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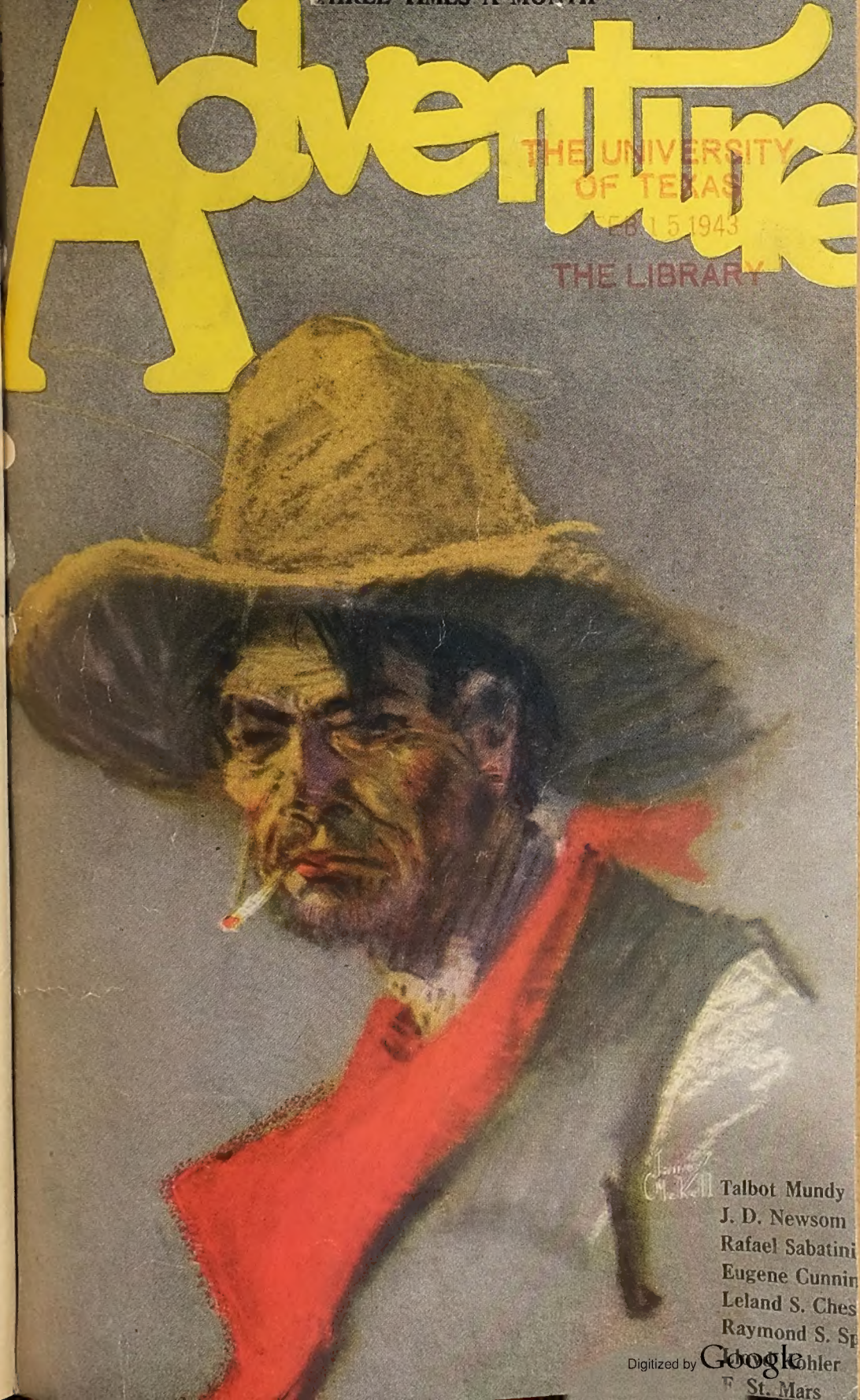

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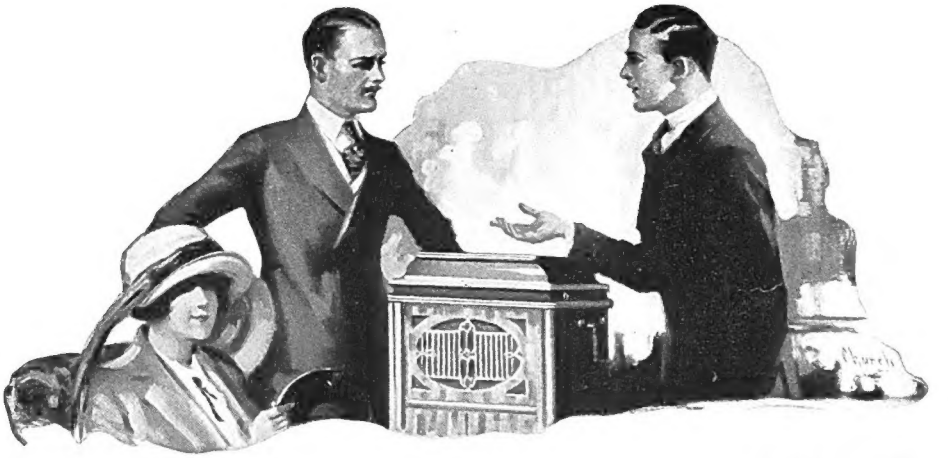

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Volume 37
Number 4

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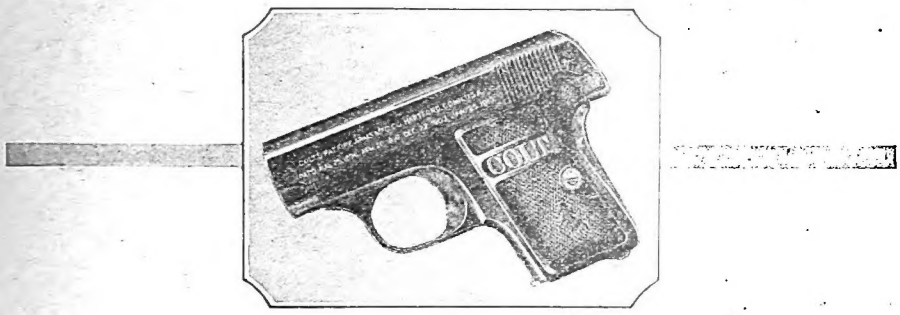

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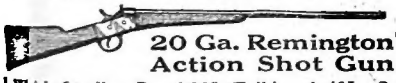

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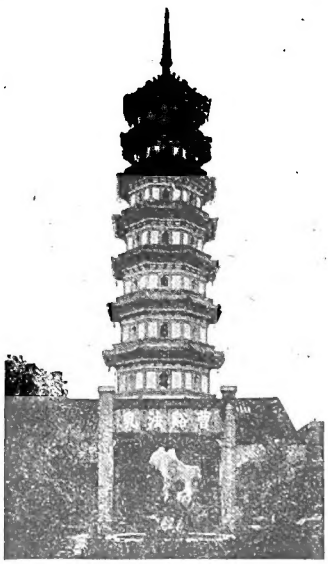

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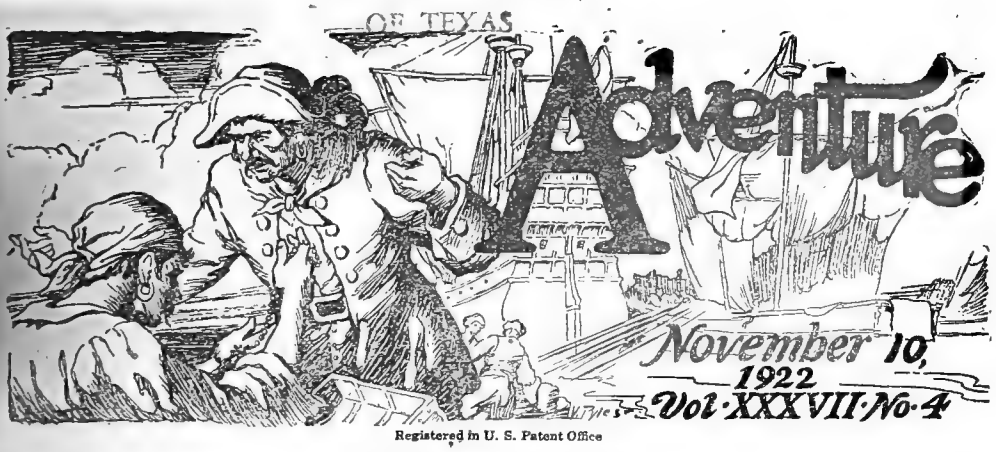

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Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 in Advance — Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents

Foreign Postage, $3.00 additional. Canadian Postage, 90 cents.

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Contents for November 10th, 1922, Issue

The Gray Mahatma *A Complete Novel* . . . . . **Talbot Mundy** 3
India—two white men pitted against Oriental mysticism and science.

Rattlesnakes—Unlimited . . . . . **Edwin L. Sabin** 79

Nose *Verse* . . . . . **John V. A. Weaver** 80

Guiding Hands . . . . . **Leland S. Chester** 81
The "Pen"—the escape, and after.

Forty Thousand B.P. . . . . . **Eugene Cunningham** 90
Cave-man days—how *Unk* became *Der Unk*.

The Desert Mouse . . . . . **Robert J. Horton** 99
West—a man-killer's "joke."

Plain Man . . . . . **Bill Adams** 108

The Sea-Hawk *A Five-Part Story Part III* . . . . . **Rafael Sabatini** 109
Algiers—the Moslem slave-market.

The Boot . . . . . **Lloyd Kohler** 139
The sea—a thin rope between life and death.

Tight Squeaks in the Sioux War of 1876 *A Bit of the Old West* **E. A. Brininstool** 147

(Continued on next page)

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(*Continued from preceding page*)

Mighty Motherhood . . . . . **F. St. Mars** 149
Africa—lions dispute the hippo's road.

Tun-kan-si-dan (The Sun) ***A Bit of Indian Lore*** . . . . **Frank H. Huston** 154

A Man's Best Dog . . . . . **Raymond S. Spears** 155
The Adirondacks—*Bowlegs* on the scent of *Old Blackie* the fox.

The Avenger . . . . . **J. D. Newsom** 164
New Caledonia—*Soadi* leaves a death-trail.

The Camp-Fire **A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers** 174

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 182

Ask Adventure 183

Our Assaying and Oil Services 183

Weapons, Past and Present 183

Fishing in North America 183

Mountains and Mountaineering 183

Lost Trails 183

Old Songs That Men Have Sung 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . . **V. E. Pyles**

Cover Design . . . . . **James C. McKell**

WHEN a homesteader is driven from his claim by hostile cattlemen and branded as a murderer, destiny and a trail across the hills lead him into a country where a lost silver-mine, an old man and his enemies plunge him into dangers far greater than that from which he had fled. "SILVER ZONE," a complete novel by Frank C. Robertson, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

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Adventure
November, 10 1922
Vol. XXXVII No. 4

THE GRAY MAHATMA

A Complete Novel BY Talbot Mundy

Author of "Moses and Mrs. Aintree," "Khufu's Real Tomb," etc.

CHAPTER I

"If you've no objection we'll leave Bombay tonight and get to work."

MELDRUM STRANGE has "a way" with him. You need all your tact to get him past the quarreling point; but once that point is left behind there isn't a finer business boss in the universe. He likes to put his finger on a desk-bell and feel somebody jump in Thibet or Wei-hei-wei or Honolulu. That's Meldrum Strange.

If you should ever let him get the full whip hand of you he would be an incorrigible tyrant; but I have never accorded him more dominion over me than the senior member of a firm, of which I am also a partner, in my judgment is entitled to. On the other hand there is no more room for two bosses in a business than for two captains on a ship, and I have never disputed his right to give orders.

So when he sent for me from San Francisco, where I was enjoying a vacation, to New York, where he was enjoying business, I took the first train.

"You've been a —— long time on the way," he remarked, as I walked into his office twenty minutes after the Chicago flyer reached Grand Central Station. "Look at this!" he growled, shoving into my hand a clipping from a western newspaper.

So I sat down and read it, he watching me the while as if he expected to convict me of full responsibility for the fact that it was raining.

"What about it?" I asked when I had finished reading.

"While you were wasting time on the West Coast this office has been busy," he snorted, looking more like General Grant than ever as he pulled out a cigar and started chewing it. "We've taken this matter up with the British Government, and we've been retained to look into it."

"You want me to go to Washington, I suppose. All right."

He snorted like a grampus after a long dive.

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"We've too many men eating their heads off in Washington! These Indian propagandists are trying to drag the United States into another foreign quarrel. You've got to go to India at once."

"That clipping is two months old," I answered. "Why the —— didn't you wire me when I was in Egypt to go on from there?"

"Look at this!" he answered, and shoved a letter across the desk.

It bore the address of a club in Simla.

Meldrum Strange, Esq.,
Messrs. Grim, Ramsden and Ross,
New York.

Dear Sir,

Having recently resigned my commission in the British Indian army I am free to offer my services to your firm, provided you have a sufficiently responsible position here in India to offer me. My qualifications and record are known to the British Embassy in Washington, D. C., to whom I am permitted to refer you, and it is at the suggestion of —— —— (he gave the name of a British Cabinet Minister who is known the wide world over) that I am making this proposal; he was good enough to promise his endorsement to any application I might care to make. If this should interest you, please send me a cablegram, on receipt of which I will hold my services at your disposal until your letter has time to reach Simla, when, if your terms are satisfactory, I will cable my acceptance without further delay.

Yours faithfully,
Athelstan King V. C., D. S. O. etc.

"Do you know who he is?" demanded Strange. "That's the fellow who went to Khinjan Caves—the best secret service officer the British ever had. I cabled him, of course. Here's his contract. You take it to him. Rush. Here's the whole dope about this propaganda. Take the quickest route to India, sign up this man King, and go after them at that end for all the two of you are worth. That's all."

I held out for ten minutes for the sake of his digestion, while he stormed about the modern method of fiddling while Rome burns.

"Nero could put it all over you!" he snapped. "Nero could play the fiddle. All you do is dabble your toes in the surf in California. Came in second did you? What has a twenty-mile swimming championship got to do with business? Can you swim to India? Pah! You beach-lizard—loafing while the world's enemies plot its destruction."

"Half-a-dozen babus aren't going to crucify the world," I objected.

"No. Of course not. Mrs. O'Leary's cow couldn't set fire to Chicago! But they haven't finished paying on the fire insurance yet! Can you make the *Mauretania?*"

My passport being unexpired, I could make the *Mauretania* and did. Moreover I was merciless to the expense account. An aeroplane took me from Liverpool to London, another from London to Paris. At Paris I just caught the Continental Express for Brindisi by way of Rome, and wallowed through a storm on the *Osiris* to Port Said, where I caught the P & O *S. S. Kinchinjunga* for Bombay, arriving there sixteen days out from New York, which wasn't bad, considering.

And I don't care how often you arrive in Bombay, the thrill increases. You steam in at dawn by Gharipuri just as the gun announces sunrise, and the dreamy bay glimmers like a prophet's vision—temples, domes, minarets, palm-trees, roofs, towers, and masts. Then, as you approach land, you can see the Parsees worshiping the Eye of Ormuzd, as they call the sun, and distinguish the imported vultures on the towers of silence, waiting for the daily freight of dead.

You stay-at-homes, who wonder why the English troubled themselves to conquer India, would know if you took one look at Bombay in the early morning. It's the same appeal that drew the prairie schooners westward. It takes you by the throat, and it's no earthly use arguing with any one who has felt India's charm by Gharipuri in the early morning. The cradle of the human race, and of all human thought, science and religion lies somewhere up beyond that blue and green and gold horizon, and sooner or later I guess we'll all go home again.

HOWEVER, I will get on with the story before you ask me what I mean by that last remark. Explanations have a way of making things more obscure. Almost before the anchor had splashed into the spawn-skeined water off the Apollo Bunder a native boat drew alongside and a very well-dressed native climbed up the companion-ladder in quest of me. I had sent King a wireless, but his messenger was away in advance of even the bankers' agents, who flock on board to tout for customs business.

He handed me a letter which simply said that the bearer, Gulab Lal Singh, would look

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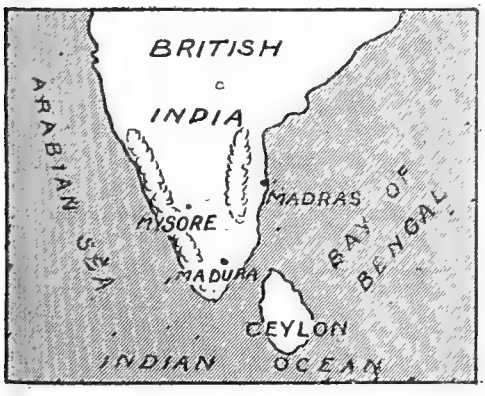
after me and my belongings. So I paid attention to the man. He was a strapping fellow, handsome as the deuce, with a Roman nose, and the eye of a gentleman unafraid. He was hardly any darker than some white men who have lived in the open, and he spoke English without much accent, only picking his words more carefully than any one would do who used the language naturally.

He said that Major King was in Bombay, but detained by urgent business. However, he invited me to Major King's quarters for breakfast, so instead of waiting for the regular launch I got into the native sailboat with him; and he seemed to have some sort of talisman for charming officials, for



on the quay an officer motioned us through without even examining my passport. Then I became absorbed in Bombay as we drove through streets that are neither of East nor West but a kind of hybrid of the two, drunken with color, and drab with the cheap efficiency of what we believe is civilization. Gulab Lal Singh rode on the box seat all the way beside the little wizened monkey of a driver.

We drew up finally in front of a neat little bungalow in a long street of similar buildings intended for British officials. The name on the gate was Leslie; but Gulab Lal Singh explained that the quarters had been lent to Major King for as long as he should remain in Bombay. There was a considerable staff of servants.

Gulab Lal Singh took me straight into the dining-room—the usual sort of dining-room of the Anglo-Indian civilian, with polo and pig-sticking cups on the side-board, and a presentation rupee-silver Kutch-work vase in the center of the table—and carried in breakfast with his own hands, standing behind my chair in silence while I ate.

Without much effort I could see his face in the mirror to my right, and when I thought he wasn't noticing I studied him carefully. Silence is a great help to observation.

"Is there anything further that the *sahib* would care for?" he asked when the meal was finished.

"Yes," I said, pulling out an envelop. "Here's your contract, Major King. If you're agreeable we may as well get that signed and mailed to New York."

I expected to see him look surprized, but he simply sat down at the table, read the contract over, and signed it. I witnessed it, and gave him a check for his first three months' salary.

Then we went out on to a veranda that was shut off from the street by brown *kaskas tatties*, sat down in deep chairs and looked each other over once again.

"How long does it take you to grow a beard?" was his first, rather surprizing question.

He wasn't wasting any time on the formalities of social give and take, but seemed deliberately bent on finding out, as a man might test a horse or a pair of shoes, just what kind of side-partner he was to have on his hands for the next few weeks.

I assessed him as a man who always put pleasure first, because business and pleasure were the same thing. He would shoot, play polo, ride hard to pig or stand up to his tiger in a jungle clearing, with the one sole end in view of keeping himself in good condition. That would be work. Then would come the pleasure of departing into the unknown on secret service, with his life in his hand and no chance whatever of being rescued from a tight place by anything except his own wit.

It was not long before I learned how differently he could treat different individuals. He had simply chosen that extraordinary way of receiving me as the best means of getting a real line on me without much loss of time. He did not drink; he did not smoke; he did not offer me drinks or tobacco; he made no effort to explain away the trick he had played; he did not compliment me on having seen through his disguise, or apologize for his own failure to keep

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up the deception. He sat opposite and studied me as he might the morning newspaper, and I returned the compliment.

It was in days to come that I discovered what a delightful companion he could be. After he had done his deliberate surveying it appeared what a charm of manner he could draw on over that critical habit of inquiry. He turned out to be such a perfect actor that I suspect he had let me see through his disguise at the moment it suited his purpose; yet he never admitted that. He would tell you things about other people, but almost nothing about himself, even after he had made up his mind to be your friend.

"You see," he said suddenly, as if a previous conversation had been interrupted, "since the war, governments have lost their grip, so I resigned from the army. You look to me like a kind of God-send. Is Meldrum Strange as wealthy as they say?"

I nodded, not knowing what men in India might have to say of him, but sure that none ever exaggerated the amount of Meldrum's fortune.

"Is he playing for power?"

"He's out to do the world good, but he enjoys the feel of it. He is absolutely on the level."

"I have a letter from Strange, in which he says you've hunted and prospected all over the world. Does that include India?"

I nodded.

"Know any of the languages?"

"Enough Hindustani to deceive a foreigner."

"Punjabi?"

I nodded.

"Are you as strong as you look?"

"Probably stronger."

"Health good?"

"Excellent."

Mind you, I was supposed to be this fellow's boss.

"I think we'll be able to work together," he said after another long look at me, and I don't believe he was using his superficial senses then.

Some men know how to let their inner faculties have rein—that sixth sense that functions in the fourth dimension—basing their final judgment on intuition.

"Are you familiar with the facts?" he asked me.

"I've the *dossier* with me. Studied it on the ship of course."

"You understand then: The Princess Yasmini and the Gray Mahatma are the two keys. The Government daren't arrest either, because it would inflame mob-passion. There's too much of that already. I'm not in position to play this game alone—can't afford to. I've joined the firm to get backing for what I want to do; I'd like that point clear. As long as we're in harness together I'll take you into confidence. But I expect absolutely free rein."

"All right," I said. And for two hours he unfolded to me a sort of panorama of Indian intrigue, including dozens of statements of sheer fact that not one person in a million would believe if set down in cold print.

"So you see," he said at last, "there's something needed in the way of unobtrusive inspection if the rest of the world is to have any kind of breathing spell. If you've no objection we'll leave Bombay tonight and get to work."

CHAPTER II

"It isn't every one who has the luck to get hit by the Gray Mahatma."

ATHELSTAN KING and I arrived, after certain hot days and choking nights, at a city in the Punjab that has had nine names in the course of history. It lies by a winding wide river, whose floods have changed the land-marks every year since men took to fighting for the common heritage. The river skirts the city like a warrior's arm bearing away a plundered woman; and like sinews of a man's arm are the sandbanks that in the dry season break up the main stream into countless narrow ones and change color with every hour and every mood of the weather. At sunset they so resemble blood that the native name for them means *veins* in any other tongue.

They say that the underlying quicksands are as treacherous as man's heart; but nearly all such proverbs are two-edged. If man's heart had not streaks of soundness, this tale could never have been written; and it is a fact that even loaded elephants can cross that river, whose mahouts are not in too great hurry, and who know the way.

The tremendous wall, along whose base the river sucks and sweeps for more than a third of the city's whole circumference has to be kept repaired by endless labor, but there are compensations. The fierce current

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guards and gives privacy to a score of palaces and temples, as well as a burning ghat.

The city has been very little altered by the vandal hand of progress. There is a red, steel railway bridge, but the same framework carries a bullock-road—one mixed train a day, as a rule, but endless carts. And close by the bridge are steps, shaded by enormous overhanging trees, where naked women bathe and peacocks swagger down to drink.

From the bridge's northern end as far as the bazaar the main street goes winding roughly parallel with the waterfront. Trees arch over it like a cathedral roof, and through the huge branches the sun turns everything beneath to gold, so that even the impious sacred monkeys achieve vicarious beauty, and the scavenger mongrel dogs scratch, sleep, and are miserable in an aureole. The parokeets that scream in sudden flights from tree to tree are meteor-showers of gold and green.

There are modern signs, as for instance, a post-office, some telegraph wires on which birds of a thousand colors perch with an air of perpetual surprize, and—tucked away in the city's busiest maze not four hundred yards from the western wall—the office of the Sikh apothecary Mulji Singh.

Mulji Singh takes life seriously, which is a laborious thing to do, and being an apostle of simple sanitation is looked at askance by the populace, but he persists.

King's specialty is making use of unconsidered trifles and misunderstood babus.

KING was attired as a native, when we sought out Mulji Singh together and found him in a back street with a hundred-yard-long waiting list of low-caste and altogether casteless cripples. He introduced me as a western doctor, and I know about as much of the doctor's trade as a kite knows of Christianity, but we got around that by emphasizing my supposed ignorance of the language; King translated Mulji's questions and invented suitable replies, he having had to act surgeon more than once beyond the northwestern border, where a man may sometimes save his own life by doctoring other people.

And of course Mulji Singh had all the gossip of the city at his fingers' ends. The castleless may neither touch nor be touched, but they can talk; and preferring to pay no money for the Sikh's bandages and pills, they regaled him instead with stories of palaces across whose threshold not even a Sikh apothecary—second class, not admissible for pension—may pass on duty.

But even the heavenborn must let the sweeper clean up now and then; so though the Sikh defiled himself a thousand times a day in the eyes of Brahmin and sweeper alike, there was little that he did not know of the city's secrets, and when he had done asking my advice he began to tell King secrets that we had really come to hear. When he closed his office at last, and we came inside to sit with him, he loosed his tongue and would have told us everything he knew if King had not steered the flow of information between channels.

"Aye, *sahib*, and this Mahatma, they say, is a very holy fellow, who works miracles. Sometimes he sits under a tree by the burning ghat, but at night he goes to the temple of the Tirthankers, where none dare follow him, although they sit in crowds outside to watch him enter and leave. The common rumor is that at night he leaves his body lifeless in a crypt in that Tirthanker temple and flies to heaven, where he fortifies himself with fresh magic. But I know where he goes by night. There comes to me with boils a one-legged sweeper who cleans a black panther's cage. The panther took his other leg. He sleeps in a cage beside the panther's, and it is a part of his duty to turn the panther loose on intruders. It is necessary that they warn this one-legged fellow whenever a stranger is expected by night, who should not be torn to pieces. Night after night he is warned. Night after night there comes this Mahatma to spend the hours in heaven! There are places less like heaven than *her* palace."

"Is he your only informant?" King demanded.

"Aye, *sahib*, the only one on that count. But there is another, whose foot was caught between stone and stone when they lowered a trap-door once in that Tirthanker temple. He bade the Tirthankers heal his foot, but instead they threw him out for having too much knowledge of matters that they said do not concern him. And he says that the trap-door opens into a passage that leads under the wall into a chamber from which access is obtained by another trap-door to a building inside *her* palace grounds within a stone-throw of that panther's cage. And

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he, too, says that the Mahatma goes nightly to *her* palace."

"Are there any stories of *her?*" King inquired.

"Thousands, *sahib!* But no two agree. It is known that she fell foul of the *raj* in some way, and they made her come to this place. I was here when she came. She has a household of a hundred women—*maunds* of furniture—*maunds* of it, *sahib!* She gave orders to her men-servants to be meek and inoffensive, so when they moved in there were not more than ten fights between them and the city-folk who thought they had as much right to the streets. There was a yellow-fanged northern devil who marshaled the serving-men, and it is he who keeps her palace gate. He keeps it well. None trespass."

"What other visitors does she entertain beside the Mahatma?"

"Many, *sahib*, though few enter by the front gate. There are tales of men being drawn up by ropes from boats in the river."

"Is there word of why they come?"

"*Sahib*, the little naked children weave stories of her doings. Each has a different tale. They call her empress of the hidden arts. They say that she knows all the secrets of the priests, and that there is nothing that she cannot do, because the gods love her and the *Rakshasas** and *Apsaras*** do her bidding."

"What about this Tirthanker temple? Who controls it?"

"None knows that, *sahib*. It is so richly endowed that its priests despise men's gifts. None is encouraged to worship in that place. When those old Tirthankers stir abroad they have no dealings with folk in this city that any man knows of."

"Are you sure they are Tirthankers?" asked King.

"I am sure of nothing, *sahib*. For aught I know they are *devils!*"

KING gave him a small sum of money, and we walked away toward the burning ghat, where there was nothing but a mean smell and a few old men with rakes gathering up ashes. But outside the ghat, where a golden mohur tree cast a wide shadow across the road there was a large crowd sitting and standing in rings around an absolutely naked, ash-smeared religious fanatic.

* Male evil spirits. ** Female evil spirits.

If we had appeared on the scene as two white men the crowd would have dispersed, for they intensely dislike being observed in any of the activities connected with their religion. But a doctor can sometimes do without offense what is denied to others, and King, in the guise of a native, contrived to pass the word that I was a person not likely to do harm.

The fanatic sat bolt-upright under the tree, unadorned by even the scrap of clothing ordained by the police. He wore no turban; his head was shaven, except for one long lock of hair which hung down as far as his shoulder, and he sat as motionless as if stuffed. But his physique was of the whip-cord type; the ash-paste made him look gray and unwholesome, but did not disguise his iron muscles; it rather emphasized them.

He appeared to have the crowd bewildered, for he cursed and blessed on no comprehensible schedule, and gave extraordinary answers to the simplest questions, not acknowledging a question at all unless it suited him.

King and I had not been there a minute before some one asked him about the Princess Yasmini. He seemed able to make his yellow eyes gleam balefully when he chose; and his prompt answer was like one of those ancient oracles, which appeared authentic but left you guessing.

"Aha! Who stares at the fire burns his eyes! A burned eye is of less use than a raw one!"

Some laughed, but not many. Most of them seemed to think there was deep wisdom in his answer to be dug for meditatively, as no doubt there was. Then a man on the edge of the crowd a long way off from me, who wore the air of a humorist, asked him about me.

"Does the shadow of this foreigner offend your honor's holiness?"

None glanced in my direction; that might have given the game away. It is considered an exquisite joke to discuss a white man to his face without his knowing it. The Gray Mahatma did not glance in my direction either.

"As a bird in the river—as a fish in the air—as a man in trouble is the foreigner in Hind!" he answered.

Then he suddenly began declaiming, making his voice ring as if his throat were brass, yet without moving his body or shifting

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his head by a hair's breadth. He did not seem conscious of the sun, that streamed down on his glaring eye-balls between the branches overhead, but there was an infernal air of self-possession about him and an almost horrible intelligence. He made the flesh of his audience creep with the dimly realized fore-knowledge of great events.

"The universe was chaos. *He* said, let order prevail, and order came out of the chaos and prevailed. The universe was in darkness. *He* said, let there be light and let it prevail over darkness; and light came out of the womb of darkness and prevailed. *He* caused the earth to overflow with men, and they were glad and full of understanding. Yet they forgot, and *He* ordained the *Kali-Yug*—an age of darkness in which all Hind should lie at the feet of foreigners. And thus ye lie in the dust. But there is an end of night, and so there is an end to *Kali-Yug*. The sun rises and mist scatters. The mist destroys itself. They who are of the darkness die with it. Bide ye the time, and watch!"

King drew me away, and we returned up-street between old temples and new iron-fronted stores toward Mulji Singh's quarters where we had left the traveling bag that we shared between us.

"You see?" he said. "If you want to stir trouble in India, give a religious tinge to it. Nobody can be arrested for talking religion, and the more vague you are, the easier it is for ignorant fools to read rioting between the lines."

"Is that Gray Mahatma linked up with propaganda in the U. S. A?" I asked, wondering.

"What's more," King answered, "he's dangerous; he's sincere—the most dangerous type of politician in the world—the honest visionary, in love with an abstract theory, capable of offering himself for martyrdom. He sincerely hates violence; and yet he is willing to inflame the popular mind to a point where violence can't possibly be prevented. Watch him now!"

We stood in the shadow of an old stone building that jutted edge-wise into the street. The crowd was beginning to close in on the Mahatma, seeking to touch him. Suddenly he flew into a fury, seized a long stick from some one near him and began beating them over the head, using both hands and laying on so savagely that ashes fell from him like pipe-clay from a shaken bag, and several men ran away with the blood pouring down their faces. However, they were reckoned fortunate.

"Some of those will charge money to let other fools touch them," said King. "Come on. Let's call on *her* now."

So we returned to Mulji Singh's stuffy little office, and King changed into a major's uniform.

"It isn't exactly according to Hoyle to wear this," he explained. "However, she doesn't know I've resigned from the army, and it's just as well not to let her know at present. People in all countries attach certain values to certain things. She might try too great liberties if I turned up at her palace in mufti. Are you ready?"

CHAPTER III

"You must stay here or else make terms with me."

NOBODY saw us walk up to Yasmini's palace gate and knock; for whoever was abroad in the heat was down by the ghat admiring the Mahatma. King thumped on the great teak gate until a meager peephole opened gingerly—an eye in the face of a carved, unpleasant looking god. Then he raised his right hand letting the sleeve draw back sufficiently to show a broad band of graven gold.

Instantly at that we heard the bolts draw, and the gate swung open wide enough to admit the two of us, slamming again at our backs like a trap lid. The great treacherous river could hardly have swallowed two men with less commotion.

The bearded giant who had admitted us stood staring at King, his long, strong fingers twitching. In his own good time King turned and saw fit to recognize him.

"Oh, hullo Ismail!"

He held a hand out, but the savage flung arms about him that were as strong as the iron gate-clamps, and King had to fight to break free from the embrace.

"Now Allah he praised, he is father of mercies! *She* warned me!" he croaked. "She knows the smell of dawn at midnight! She said, 'He cometh soon!' and none believed her, save only I. This very dawn said she, 'Thou, Ismail,' she said, 'be asleep at the gate when he cometh and thine eyes shall be thrown to the city dogs!' Aye! Oho! Catch a mongoose unawares—twitch a tiger by the whiskers as he sniffs his kill—*then*

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steal a march on *her! Sahib*, she loves thee——"

"*Chup!*" King ordered; and that either means "Keep silence, friend!" or "Shut up, you fool!" according as how you modulate your voice. He nodded to lead on, and Ismail obeyed with a deal of pantomime intended to convey a sense of partnership with roots in the past and its fruition now.

The way was down a passage between high, carved walls so old that antiquarians burn friendship in disputes not so much about the century as the very era of that quiet art—under dark arches with latticed windows into unexpected gardens fresh with the smell of sprinkled water—by ancient bronze gateways into other passages that opened into stone-paved courts with fountains in the midst—building joining on to building and court meeting court until, where an old black panther snarled at us between iron bars, an arch and a solid bronze door admitted us at last into the women's pleasaunce—a wonderland of jasmine, magnolia and pomegranates set about a marble pool and therein mirrored among rainbow-colored fishes.

Beyond the pool a flight of marble steps rose fifty feet until it passed through a many-windowed wall into the *panch mahal*—the quarters of the women. At their foot Ismail halted.

"Go thou up alone! Leave this elephant with me!" he said, nudging me and pointing with his thumb toward a shady bower against the garden wall.

Without acknowledging that pleasantry King took my arm and we went straight forward together, our tread resounding strangely on steps that for centuries had felt no sterner shock than that of soft slippers and naked, jeweled feet.

We were taking nobody entirely by surprize; that much was obvious. Before we reached the top step two women opened a door and ran to meet us. Not particularly lovely, these two—but have you ever been met at the head of a marble stairway by little laughing women in diaphanous attire, who wish you to believe that they consider you almost a deity?

They were dressed in the purest white muslin with more dawn-colored muslin underneath—stuff thinner than the silk that spiders weave. One woman threw over King's head such a prodigious garland of jasmine buds that he had to loop it thrice about his shoulders. Then each took a hand of one of us and we entered between doors of many-colored wood, treading on mat-strewn marble, their bare feet pattering beside ours. There were rustlings to right and left, and once I heard laughter, smothered instantly. I could almost feel expectancy amid the hushed silence, and was aware of new emptiness, warm with the scent of women but a moment gone.

At last, at the end of a wide hall before many-hued silken curtains our two guides stopped. As they released our hands, with the always surprizing strength that is part of the dancing woman's stock-in-trade, they slipped behind us suddenly and thrust us forward through the curtains.

There was not much to see in front of us. We found ourselves in a paneled corridor, whose narrow windows overlooked the river, facing a painted door sixty paces distant at the farther end. King strode down the corridor and knocked.

The answer was one word that I did not catch, although it rang like a suddenly struck chord of music, and the door yielded to the pressure of King's hand.

I entered behind him and the door swung shut of its own weight with a click. We were in a high-ceilinged, very long room, having seven sides. There were windows to right and left and, facing the door, a third enormous window more like a conservatory, containing cushioned seats that overhung the river.

A deep divan piled with scented cushions occupied the whole length of one long wall, and there were several huge cushions on the floor against another wall; but all the other furniture consisted of two small carved tables, one bearing a caraffe of amethyst colored glass; but there was an enormous Persian carpet—an absolutely priceless thing—that covered almost the entire floor and was so large that one end of it had had to be rolled against the wall; and overhead was a candelabra of a sort I have never seen anywhere else, hand-wrought of brass in the form of hundreds of cobras each having seven heads.

The walls were paneled with wood, cracked here and there but painted with colors whose purity had defied the centuries, depicting Hindu legends and the improprieties of some of India's eight or nine million gods. There was one other door besides that we had entered by.

We stood in that room alone, but I know

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that King felt as uneasy as I did, for there was sweat on the back of his neck. We were being watched by unseen eyes. There is no mistaking that sensation.

Suddenly a voice broke silence like a golden bell whose overtones go widening in rings into infinity, and a vision of loveliness parted the curtains of that other door.

"My lord comes as is meet—spurred, and ready to give new kingdoms to his king! Oh, how my lord is welcome!" she said in Persian.

Her voice thrilled you, because of its perfect resonance, exactly in the middle of the note. She looked into King's eyes with challenging familiarity that made him smile, and then eyed me wonderingly. She had wit, that woman—wit and humor, for they expressed themselves in some vague way before she spoke. She could take the sting out of a remark before she made it, or put one in, as suited her convenience. I did not need to be told that she was resentful of my presence because she wanted King all alone to herself, nor that she proposed to make the best of it rather than challenge King's judgment for the present. And of course, if you weigh two hundred and fifty pounds, you are rather an easy mark for any woman's tongue. She glanced from me to a picture on the wall in blue of the Elephant-god—enormous, opulent, urbane, and then back again at me, and smiled very sweetly.

"So you have brought Ganesha with you? The god of good luck! How wonderful! How does one behave toward a real god?"

And while she said that she laid her hands on King's arms as naturally as if he were a lover whom she had not seen perhaps since yesterday. Plainly, there was absolutely nothing between him and her except his own obstinate independence. She was his, if he wanted her; although what the ultimate outcome of that would be might be another question. But King seemed to know no more trouble in resisting her than if she had really been what she chose to pretend to be—fair, frank and friendly.

Not her bitterest enemies—and she can boast more of those than ordinary folk could aspire to in a dozen lifetimes—could have charged the Princess Yasmini at that minute with neglecting to stage-manage opportunity. She had left no art unplied. Clothed in ivory-colored silken gossamer, she passed between us and the window and let herself be bathed in golden sunlight, rearranging the cushions in the window-seat and then coming back to take King by the arms again. From the jeweled amber slippers on her bare feet, to coral lips and flame-begotten hair, she stood gladder at the sight of King than any flower to greet the dawn—and yet, though unafraid of him in one sense, and in another sense willing to belong to him, not his and thoroughly aware of it.

It was East against West, and she was much too deadly wise to force an issue yet. Somehow, by art intangible and subtlest guile, she managed to convey a hint that he was really there to be forgiven and that the gulf between them was not quite unbridgable. And King fell on guard as a man might raise his rapier point, meeting her lovely, laughing, mocking, understanding, luminous, liquid eyes with what I honestly believe was nothing more than scientific interest.

She did not make the crass mistake of falling into his arms. The East, of course, knows nothing whatever of courtship in our western understanding of the word; for how can it, with all that impenetrable custom interposed? It flings itself upon a lover—drops ripe into his lap whenever Hanuman, the monkey-god who governs passion, sees fit to shake the tree, and thereafter squanders the swift hours that a less adventurous West postpones.

But the Princess Yasmini came into the world with no more Indian ancestry than has sufficed to give her understanding of East as well as of the West. There is Viking blood in her veins, and she is western enough to see through western reticence. She took King's hand with a laugh that had its roots in past companionship and led him to the middle, deepest window-seat, beneath which the river could be heard gurgling busily.

Then, when she had drawn the silken hangings until the softened light suggested lingering, uncounted hours, and had indicated with a nod to me a cushion in the corner, she came and lay on the cushions close to King, chin on hand, where she could watch his eyes.

KING sat straight and square, watching her with caution that he did not trouble to conceal. She took his hand and raised the sleeve until the broad, gold, graven bracelet showed.

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"That link forged in the past must bind us two more surely than an oath," she said smiling.

"I used it to show to the gatekeeper."

He sat coolly waiting for her next remark, and with almost unnecessary candor began to remove the bracelet and offer it back to her. So she unmasked her batteries, with a delicious little rippling laugh and a lazy, cat-like movement that betokened joy in the danger that was coming, if I know anything at all of what sign-language means.

"I knew that very day that you resigned your commission in the army, and I laughed with delight at the news, knowing that the gods who are our servants had contrived it. I know why thou art here," she said; and the change from you to thou was not haphazard.

There are princes of the newer as well as of the old world who have offered royal benevolences to be thou-ed by Yasmini. They do say that a European king has knelt to her. Yet this King smiled and continued to sit bolt-upright, she watching him and reading the signs as a watchman on the city wall reads signs of the monsoon.*

"It is well known, Princess, that your spies are the cleverest in India," he answered.

"Spies? I need no spies as long as old India lives. Friends are better."

"Do all princesses break their promises?" he countered, meeting her eyes steadily.

"Never yet did I break one promise, whether it was for good or evil."

"Princess," he answered, looking sternly at her, "in Jamrud Fort you agreed to take no part again in politics, national or international in return for a promise of personal freedom and permission to reside in India."

"True. Core of the very heart of truth."

"It was a personal promise made to me, as well as an undertaking given to the Government. A double oath twice binding!"

"No oath is one-sided," she answered. "My promise was contingent on my liberty. But is this liberty—to be forced to reside in this old palace, with the spies of the Government keeping watch on my doings, except when they chance to be outwitted? Nevertheless, I have kept both promises. Yes both! Thou knowest me better than to think that I need to break promises in order to outwit a government of Englishmen!"

"Quibbles won't help, Princess," he answered. "You promised to do nothing that Government might object to."

"Well; will they object to my religion?" she retorted, mocking him.

Her eyes were triumphantly mischievous as he pondered that answer, and she gave him as little respite as a fencer would whose antagonist showed signs of weakening.

"Has the British *raj* at last screwed up its courage to the point of trespassing behind the purdah and blundering in among religious exercises?"

"Religion has nothing to do with it," he answered.

"No? You know India nearly as well as I do! Consider! Purdah and religion—two spheres in which no modern government dare interfere! I play no politics. I watch the awakening sap of old religion rise in the soul of India's women, and I laugh! The play amuses me. I have withdrawn into a field where no government of Englishmen dare follow."

No man in his senses ever challenges a woman's argument until he knows the whole of it and has unmasked its ulterior purpose. So King sat still and said nothing, knowing that that was precisely what she did not want.

"You must make terms with me, heaven-born!" she went on, changing her tone to one of rather more suggestive firmness. "The *Kali-Yug** is drawing to a close, and India awakes! There is froth on the surface—a rising here, an agitation there, a deal of wild talk everywhere, and the dead old government proposes to suppress it in the dead old ways, like men with paddles seeking to beat the waves down flat! But the winds of God blow, and the boat of the men with the paddles will be upset presently. Who then shall ride the storm? They will try to stall religion and to put their bit into the very teeth of God! Their gunners will be told to shoot the froth as it forms and rises! But if there is a wise man anywhere he will make terms with me, and will set himself to guide the underlying forces that may otherwise whelm everything. I think thou art wise, my heaven-born. Thou wert wise once on a time."

The test of a man, of course, is how he governs himself in emergencies. King's smile grew kinder, and his eye more genial and amused.

* Season of heavy rains.

* Age of darkness.

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"Do you think you can rule India?" he asked her; and he did not make the mistake of suggesting ridicule.

It was as if he had asked her: Can you ride that horse, or can you play that instrument?

"Who else can do it?" she retorted. "Do you think we come into the world to let fate be our master? Why does one know more than another? Why does one have vision while the other can not see? Why have I royal blood and royal views, wealth, understanding and ambition, while the others have blindness and vague yearnings? Can you answer?"

"I have seen you lay vast plans that came to nothing," he said quietly.

"True. That was education. By failures we learn. In those days I, too, was deceived by the delusion that a few men's swords could govern the tide of destiny. But now I know that it is destiny that governs tides. Unless we lower the dam it bursts and there is ruin for a while. Better help me, Athelstan; for though I am a royal woman and not in the least afraid, I need a man."

"Princess," he answered, "I had only one object in coming here."

"I know that," she said nodding.

"I have simply come to warn you."

"*Chut!*" she answered with her chin between her hands and her elbows deep in the cushions. "I know how much is known. This man—what is his name? Ramsden? Pouff! Ganesha is far better! Ganesha is from America. Those fools who went to prepare the American mind for what is coming, because they were altogether too foolish to be anything but in the way in India, have been found out, and Ganesha has come like a big bull-buffalo to save the world by thrusting his clumsy horns into things he does not understand! I tell you, Athelstan, that however much is known there is much more that is not known. You would better make terms with me!"

"What you must understand, Princess, is that your plan to overthrow the West and make the East the world's controlling force, is known by those who can prevent you," he answered quietly. "You see, I can't go away from here and tell whoever asks me that you are observing your promise to——"

"No," she interrupted with a ringing, merry laugh of triumph. "You speak truth without knowing it! You can not go away!"

She sat as bolt-upright as he, and mocked the two of us as merrily as if we sat in chains.

CHAPTER IV

"They know something that we don't, that's all."

PRINCESS YASMINI'S boast was good. If we had had weapons, we would hardly have used them against women except in the very last resort. It was just possible that, like Samson in Philistia, I was strong enough to fight a way out of that maze of courts and passages, but much more likely that an even more mortifying fate than Gulliver's would be mine if I tried it.

But we had come to solve a problem, not to run away from it, and she looked disconcerted by our rather obvious willingness to be her prisoners for a while.

"Do you think I can not be cruel?" she asked suddenly.

"I have seen you at your worst, as well as at your best!" King answered.

"You act like a man who has resources. Yet you have none," she said slowly, as if reviewing all the situation in her mind. "None knows where you are—not even Mulji Singh, with whom you left your other clothes before putting on that uniform the better to impress me! The bag that you and 'Ganesha' share between you, like two mendicants emerging from the jail, is now in a room in this palace. You came because you saw that if I should be arrested there would be insurrection. You said so to Ommony sahib, and his butler overheard. But not even Ommony knows where you are. He said to you: 'If you can defeat that woman without using violence, you'll stand alone in the world as the one man who could do it. But if you use violence, though you kill her, she will defeat you and all the rest of us.' Is not that what your friend Ommony said?"

"What kind of terms do you want me to make with you, Princess?" King answered, and her laughter pealed delight like a sudden carillon of perfectly tuned bells.

"I will make you ruler of all India!" she said. "Another may wear the baubles, but thou shalt be the true king, even as thy name is! Trained parrots shall pass the laws and shoulder the responsibility. But thou shalt be the power behind them, thine the guiding hand, thine the rod that smites

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and the word that rewards. And behind thee, me, Yasmini, whispering wisdom and laughing to see the politicians strut!"

King leaned back and laughed at her.

"Do you really expect me to help you ruin my own countrymen, go back on my color, creed, education, oath and everything, and——"

"No need," she answered. "They are dead leaves in the forest. They will molder and manure the growing trees. Athelstan, all India is waking! The little puppet-show rebellions here and there are only symptoms of it. The poor bewildered Government hits at symptoms, like the doctors who seek to abolish plague by catching rats. Deluded fools! The East—the East, Athelstan, is waking! Better make terms with me, and thou shalt live to ride on the arising East as God rides on the wind and bits and governs it!"

"Very well," he said. "Show me. I'll do nothing blindfold."

"Hah! Thou art not half-conquered yet," she laughed. "And what of Ganesha? Is this mountain of bones and thews a person to be trusted, or shall we show him how much stronger than him is a horsehair in a clever woman's fingers?"

"He is my friend," King answered.

"I know he is. But so was the Kaiser the king's friend. Friendship and love are fickle forces. Think how dearly a wolf loves mutton, Athelstan! I have heard the missionaries, throwing dust in the eyes of a congregation, begin their address with 'dearly beloved friends'!"

"This man Ramsden is my friend," King said again.

"Are you *his* friend?" she retorted.

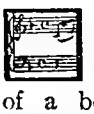
He nodded.

"It would be better for Ganesha to die now, swiftly, with a horsehair at his throat, than to see and hear what he otherwise must see and hear, and fall into less merciful hands afterwards," she warned. "Great carcases like his can hold more pain and feel it more than thine or mine. This is a door that admits only one way, Athelstan! There is no turning back. No hesitating afterwards! One speck of doubt on the mirror of a man's mind, and there is one more unfortunate to be experimented on! If thou art his friend, Athelstan, better bid me have him slain at once, unless his will be as strong as his muscles and his courage stronger than both together!"

King smiled, and I did my best.

"You are going to see the naked heart of India!" she said. "Better to have your eyes burned out now than see that and be false to it afterwards!"

Then, since we failed to order red-hot needles for our eyes, she cried out once—one clear note that sounded almost exactly as if she had struck a silver gong. A woman entered like the living echo to it. Yasmini spoke, and the woman disappeared again.



BELOW us the river swallowed and gurgled along the palace wall, and we caught the occasional thumping of a boat-pole. The thumping ceased exactly underneath us, and a man began singing in the time-hallowed language of Rajasthan. I think he was looking upward as he sang, for each word reached its goal.

"Oh warm and broad the plow land lies,
The idle oxen wait!
We pray thee, holy river, rise,
Nor glut thy fields too late!
The yĕar awakes! The slumbering seed
Swells to its birth! Oh river, heed!"

"Strange time of year for that song, Princess! Is that one of your spies?" asked King, not too politely.

"One of my friends," she answered. "I told you: India awakes! But watch."

It was growing dark. Two women came and drew the curtains closer. Other women brought lamps and set them on stools along one wall; others again brought tapers and lit the candles in the hydra-headed candelabra.

"It is really too light yet," Yasmini grumbled, as if the gods who marshal in the night had not kept faith with her. But even so, the shadows danced among India's gods on the wall facing the row of stools.

Then there began wood-wind music, made by musicians out of sight, low and sweet, suggesting unimaginable mysteries, and one by one through the curtains opposite there came in silently seven women on bare feet that hardly touched the carpet; and all the stories about nautch girls, all the travelers' tales of how eastern women dance with their arms, not feet; all that crazy piffle about Indian dances being nothing more than sex-appeal vanished that instant into the *ewigkeit* of lies. This was dancing—art absolute. They no longer seemed to be flesh and blood women possessed of weight and other limitations; their footfall was hardly audible, and you could not hear them

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breathe at all. They were like living shadows, and they danced the way the shadows of the branches do on a jungle clearing when a light breeze makes the trees laugh.

Nor was that the most wonderful part of it. Their own shadows, cast by the lamplight, danced among the gods on the wall in movements just as perfectly arranged as theirs, so that theirs and the shadow-dance were one. It had some sort of mystic meaning no doubt, although I did not understand it; but what I did understand was, that the whole arrangement was designed to produce a sort of mesmerism in the beholder.

However, school yourself to live alone and think alone for a quarter of a century or so, meeting people only as man to man instead of like a sheep among a flock of sheep, and you become immune to that sort of thing. All it can do to you then is to set you on guard; and I think that is why the English have managed to hold India all these years. They are not so amenable to suggestions as some other folk; they think for themselves and are skeptics, and although that makes them difficult to get along with very often, and has given them a reputation for aloofness and rudeness as well as stupidity, which it may be they deserve, it has, nevertheless, made of them a bulwark between the East and West that has done the rest of the world a service.

The Princess Yasmini seemed to realize that neither King nor I were being drawn into the net of dreaminess that those trained women of hers were weaving. The flutes from somewhere out of sight called more subtly than a charmer coaxing snakes out of their holes. It was pale-blue music, if you know what that means. It suggested that the universe is not the universe at all, but something else; that a man is not a man, not captain of his soul and master of his fate, but a whiff of something intangible, at the mercy of unseen spirits. Unholy stuff. Beautiful as the women who tempted St. Anthony of Padua, and much more dangerous because less obviously bent on mischief.

"Watch!" said Yasmini suddenly. And then we saw what very few men have been privileged to see.

She joined the dance; and you knew then who had taught those women. Theirs had been after all a mere interpretation of her vision. Hers was the vision itself. They sank to the floor in a circle around her and were part of it. The secret of her skill was this—that, whereas they had staged a spectacle, she staged nothing. She was not acting.

She was *It*—the thing itself—no more an interpretation than anything in nature is. They had been conscious of observers, but not she. Yasmini became India—India's heart; and I suppose that if King and I had understood her we would have been swept into her vortex, as it were, like drops of water into an ocean.

She was unrestrained by any need, or even willingness to explain herself. She was talking the same language that the nodding blossoms and the light and shadow talk that go chasing each other across the hillsides. And while you watched you seemed to know all sorts of things—secrets that disappeared from consciousness a moment afterwards.

You know, of course, what strange thoughts come to you when you listen to organ music—or perhaps when you lie lazily in the open and hear water rippling along a bank—or when you gaze upward through the pine branches and see them move against blue infinity; well, she had the skill to bring such thoughts down to earth and make them dance with her; and the flute music sounded like the wind sighing through it all.

You had to remind yourself that you were a person, an individual, sitting watching something, and not a dreamer, part of the very dream. And as if that were not enough, she began singing presently, commencing on the middle F as every sound in nature does and disregarding conventional limitations just as she did when dancing.

INDIA is the motherland of music, as of all other fundamental knowledge. The men who wrote the Vedic hymns knew all that men *can* know about the properties of sound, so that every syllable they set down has its proper quality and quantity and meaning, exactly as every sound in nature has. Most Westerners trying to understand Eastern music are as much at loss as if they tried to read Sanskrit without studying the language first; men born and raised in cities almost never make head or tail of it—although there is true music in the roar of a great city—but out-door men, who have listened

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to the harmony of wind and trees and waterfalls, can often seize it instantly and understand.

It was easier to understand the music than the song, for the song sounded like the first chapter of Genesis with Revelation blended into it. She sang first of the void before the worlds were made; and then of chaos, every sound she uttered being the voice of bewilderment itself striving for recognition. And presently form began to gather, and after that light came and, one step at a time, all creation crept into her song, her lissome body seeming to weave the hieroglyphics that recorded it in air.

She sang of the birth of peoples; of the history of peoples; of the patterns of their wanderings to and fro as they worked out the will of destiny; until thought seemed to take in hemispheres and centuries at one view and the only thing incredible was incredulity. You could not believe, while you listened, that men could live, and teach, and preach, who failed to see the meaning of all that she unfolded. (It was another matter after she had left off singing.)

She sang of India as the mother of all speech, song, race and knowledge; of truths that every great thinker since the world's beginning has propounded; and of India as the home of all of them, until, whether you would or not, at least you seemed to see the undeniable truth of that.

And then, in a weird, wild, melancholy minor key came the story of the *Kali-Yug* —the mist that went up in Genesis—the age of darkness creeping over India, condemning her for her sins and her forgetfulness to lie under the feet of conquerors for the "time, times and half a time" that Revelation mentions, when knowledge should almost die out of India, but should be imitated mechanically by what her song described as the children nations using engines to accomplish what India once knew how to do, as simply as the sun and stars know how to shine.

She sang of India under the hoof of ugliness and ignorance and plague, and yet of a few who kept the old light burning in secret—of hidden books, and of stuff that men call magic handed down the centuries from lip to lip in caves and temple cellars and mountain fastnesses, wherever the mysteries were safe from profane eyes.

And then the key changed again, striking that fundamental middle F that is the mother-note of all the voices of nature and, as Indians maintain, of the music of the spheres as well. It was as if with that note she had torn aside a veil and stripped knowledge naked! Music and song and dance became laughter. Doubt vanished, for there seemed nothing left to doubt, as she began to sing of India rising at last again triumphant over darkness, mother of the world and of all the nations of the world, awake, unconquerable.

Never was another song like that one! Nor was there ever such a climax. As she finished on a chord of triumph that seemed like a new spirit bursting the bonds of ancient mystery and sank to the floor among her women, there stood the Gray Mahatma in their midst, not naked any longer, but clothed from head to heel in a saffron-colored robe, and without his paste of ashes.

He stood like a statue with folded arms, his yellow eyes blazing and his look like a lion's; and how he had entered the room I confess I don't know to this hour, nor does Athelstan King, who is a trained observer of unusual happenings. Both doors were closed, and I will take oath that neither had been opened since the women entered. There was certainly no trap-door in the floor, for the great Persian carpet was spread all over it; and if there was a sliding panel somewhere among those painted gods, as I suppose there must have been if the thing can be explained at all, it was wondrous cunningly concealed and, even so, that did not account for neither of us having seen him enter.

But the East is full of mysteries that only the East can explain. The tourists, who return and tell you that the magic they have seen was claptrap tell the truth no doubt, but nothing like the whole of it. The man who has not seen is hardly a judge of what he did not see, any more than the scientist, who tells you that things are impossible, is worth believing for a minute. Nothing is impossible, and only nothing! That Gray Mahatma stood there, that is all I know; and he breathed, and spoke.

"Peace!" was his first word, spoken like one in authority, who ordered peace and dared to do it.

He stood looking for more than a minute at King and me with, I think, just a flicker of scorn on his thin lips, as if he were wondering whether we were men enough to face

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the ordeal before us. Then indefinably, yet quite perceptibly, his mood changed and his appearance with it. He still looked as proud as a lion at bay, but he grew more human, losing his statuesque rigidity and smiling with an air of friendliness. He held his right hand out.

"Will you not shake hands with me?" he asked.

Now that was a thing that no sanctimonious Brahman would have dreamed of doing, for fear of being defiled by the touch of a casteless foreigner; so he was either above or below the caste laws, and it is common knowledge how those who are below caste cringe and toady. So he evidently reckoned himself above it, and the Indian who can do that has met and overcome more tyranny and terrors than the West knows anything about. It did not strike me at the moment as strange that he should speak such excellent English, but I did feel ill-mannered in having sat there staring at him as if he were an animal on exhibition, so I accepted his unexpected invitation and walked toward him.

I wish I could make exactly clear what happened when I took his outstretched hand.

His fingers closed on mine with a grip like marble. There are few men who are stronger than I am; I can out-lift the stage professionals; yet I could no more move his hand or pull mine free than if he had been a bronze image with my hand set solid in the casting. There was nothing electric about it—no thrill of contact with magnetic fluid such as hysterical dabblers in the occult speak of. I am quite sure I was not mesmerised. It felt exactly as if my hand were held in solid rock, and though I did my utmost I could neither move his hand, arm or body by a fraction of an inch nor wrench my hand free.

"That is for your own good," he said pleasantly, letting go at last. "That other man knows better, but you might have been so unwise as to try using violence. Therefore out of kindness I have given you a warning that you will understand. Pray be seated again."

"I'm glad you had that experience," said King in a low voice, as I went back to the window-seat. "Don't let yourself be bewildered by it. There's an explanation for everything. They know something that we don't, that's all."

CHAPTER V

"Fear is the presence of death!"

AT A sign from the Gray Mahatma all the women except Yasmini left the room. Yasmini seemed to be in a strange mood mixed of mischief and amused anticipation, coupled to a curious respect for the Mahatma. She placed a cushion for him, which he spurned away. She brought him water in a crystal drinking cup, and he refused it so contemptuously that he almost knocked it out of her hand. So she danced a few ridiculous steps behind him and came over to the window-seat to sit between King and me. You got the impression somehow that she was only half-afraid of the Mahatma; the other half was appreciation of his value to herself.

The Mahatma sat down exactly in the middle of the carpet, and his method was unique. It looked just as if an unseen hand had taken him by the hair and lowered him gradually, for he crossed his legs and dropped to the floor as evenly and slowly as one of those freight elevators that disappear beneath the city side-walks. On the other hand, the rest of his mechanical rigidity had vanished and in its place was a kind of patronising urbanity, based, or so it seemed to me, on perfect confidence that he could make things highly disagreeable for us if he chose.

He seemed to attach a great deal of importance to his exact position and glanced repeatedly at the walls as if to make sure that he was not sitting an inch or two too far to the right or left; however he had gaged his measurements exactly at the first attempt and did not move, once he was seated.

"You two *sahibs*," he began, with a slight emphasis on the word *sahib*, as if he wished to call attention to the fact that he was according us due courtesy, "you two honorable gentlemen," he continued, as if mere courtesy perhaps were not enough, "have been chosen unknown to yourselves. For there is but one Chooser, whose choice is never known until the hour comes. For the chosen there is no road back again. Even if you should prefer death, your death could not now be of your own choosing; for, having been chosen, there is no escape from service to the Purpose, and though you would certainly die if courage failed you, your death would be more terrible than

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life, since it would serve the Purpose without benefiting you."

He paused and let that overture sink in. I glanced sideways at King and Yasmini. She was in raptures. Her breast was fluttering like a bird's. King looked simply curious.

"You are both honest men," he continued, "for the one has resigned honors and emoluments in the army for the sake of serving India; the other has accepted toilsome service under a man who seeks, however mistakenly, to serve the world. If you were not honest you would never have been chosen. If you had made no sacrifices of your own free will, you would not have been acceptable."

"How do you know these things?" I asked him, and Yasmini giggled.

"How does a child know how to breathe?" he answered. "As a plant is to a child, as a child's understanding is to your own, so is your knowledge to my knowledge. It is beyond you, but you may have the use of it."

Yasmini clasped her hands and laid her chin on them among the cushions. She was reveling in intellectual enjoyment, as sinfully I daresay as some folk revel in more material delights. The Mahatma took no notice of her, but continued.

"You have heard of the *Kali-Yug*, the age of darkness. It is at an end. The nations presently begin to beat swords into plowshares because the time has come. But there is yet much else to do, and the eyes of those who have lived so long in darkness are but blinded for the present by the light, so that guides are needed, who can see. You two shall see—a little!"

I began to feel a prodigious resentment against this fellow in a saffron night-shirt, who presumed to outline my career for me. He detected it instantly.

"You and I are both flies on the wheel," he assured me. "Some fools were chosen by other fools to go to the United States and try to pave the way for understanding between East and West. That was a mistake. But even mistakes serve the Purpose. The errors of those fools have sent you hither—where you may be taught to see—a little!"

It was becoming intolerably hot in the room with the curtains drawn and all those lights burning, but I seemed to be the only one who minded it. The candles in the chandelier were kept from collapsing by metal sheaths, but the very flames seemed to feel the heat and to flicker like living things that wilted.

"Corn is corn and grass is grass," said the Mahatma, "and neither one can change the other. Yet the seed of grass that is selected can improve all grass, as they understand who strive with problems of the field. Therefore ye two, who have been chosen, shall be sent as the seeds of grass to the United States to carry on the work that no Indian can properly accomplish. Corn to corn, grass to grass. That is your destiny.

He paused, as if waiting for the sand to run out of an hour-glass. There was no hour-glass, but the suggestion was there just the same.

"Nevertheless," he went on presently, "there are some who fail their destiny, even as some chosen seeds refuse to sprout. You will need besides your honesty such courage as is committed to few. And with courage you will need audacity. And with audacity you will need strength; for in the womb of strength is silence. And silence is your greatest need of all; for the mysteries that you shall learn, and the sights that you shall see may not be told by you to any one, and the penalty for disobedience is death."

That statement had the effect of making me feel furious. I'm not given to issuing threats, except by way of fair and clear warning when I mean exactly what I say, and a threat from some one else to me is either a challenge or a joke, depending on the individual. Again he instantly detected my mental process, as his next words proved, although he continued to speak as calmly as a chemist watching a familiar experiment.

"Anger is weakness. Resentment is impotence. Wrath is the foam of impurity passing off. Pride is lunacy. Arrogance is cowardice assuming a disguise. Incredulity is ignorance. Ignorance is the friend of fear. And fear is the presence of death. Therefore dismiss anger, and listen!

"ONCE on a time before the *Kali-Yug* began, when the Aryans, of whom you people are descendants, lived in this ancient motherland, the whole of all knowledge was the heritage of every man, and what today are called miracles were understood as natural working of pure

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law. It was nothing in those days for a man to walk through fire unscathed, for there was very little difference between the gods and men, and men knew themselves for masters of the universe, subject only to *Parabralim.**

"Nevertheless, the sons of men grew blind, mistaking the shadow for the substance. And because the least error when extended to infinity produces chaos, the whole world became chaos, full of nothing but rivalries, sickness, hate, confusion—which indeed themselves are nothing, even as darkness is nothing, disappearing when the light shines.

And because all these things are nothing, but delusion, there is an end to them.

"Meanwhile, the sons of men, ever seeking the light they lost, have spread around the earth, ever mistaking the shadow for the substance, until they have imitated the very thunder and lightning, calling them cannon; they have imitated all the forces of the universe and called them steam, gasolene, electricity, chemistry and what not. Searching the shadows they have found shadow; all such powers as men once had at their command they have imitated, so that now they fly by machinery, who once could fly without effort and without wings.

"And now they grow deathly weary, not understanding why. Now they hold councils, one nation with another, seeking to substitute a lesser evil for the greater, offering disarmament in order to provide more opportunity for other forms of strife, none looking backward to the first beginnings, since all have wandered so far into delusion that none can discern the starting point.

"Nevertheless, through all the ages of the *Kali-Yug* there have been men who kept the old light burning. In spite of the priests, in spite of kings, in spite of armies, in spite of conquests and abominations and waste and destruction there have ever been men who stood still and clung to the ancient knowledge lest it cease altogether and the sons of men vanish utterly into everlasting oblivion.

"Once in every hundred years men have been sent forth to prove by public demonstration that there is a greater science than all that are called sciences. None knew when the end of the *Kali-Yug* might be, and it was thought that if men saw things they could not explain, perhaps they would turn and seek the true mastery of the universe. But what happened? You, who are from America; is there one village in all America where men do not speak of Indians as fakirs and mock-magicians? For that there are two reasons. One is that there are multitudes of Indians who are thieves and liars, who know nothing and seek to conceal their ignorance beneath a cloak of deceit and trickery. The other is, that men are so deep in delusion, that when they do see the unexplainable they seek to explain it away; two-thirds of the world is superstitious and calls supernatural whatever it can not understand; the other third is incredulous and looks for hidden mechanism. Whereas the truth is that there are natural laws which, if understood by all, would at once make all men masters of the universe.

"I will give you an example. Today they are using wireless telephones, who twenty years ago would have mocked whoever had suggested such a thing. Yet it is common knowlege that forty years ago, for instance, when Roberts the British general led an army into Afghanistan in wintertime and fought a battle at Kandahar, the news of his victory was known in Bombay, a thousand miles away, as soon as it had happened, whereas the Government, possessing semaphores and the telegraph, had to wait many days for the news.* How did that occur? Can you or any one explain it?

"If I were to go forth and tell how it happened, the men who profit by the telegraphs and the deep-sea cables, would desire to kill me; and if there were no law under which they could kill me, they would proclaim me a lunatic and seek to keep me in prison.

"That is the reason why for so many years there have been no public demonstrations of the powers that are every man's who will open his eyes and use them.

"There is only one country in the world where such things can be successfully explained, and that is India; but not even in India until India is free. When the millions of India once grasp the fact of freedom they will forget superstition and understand. Then they will claim their powers and use them. Then the world

* The supreme idea of Deity.

* This is incontestibly historical fact. See Lord Roberts' book, *Forty-one Years in India.*

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will see, and wonder. And presently the world, too, will understand.

"Therefore, India must be free. These three hundred and fifty million people who speak one hundred and forty-seven languages must be set free to work out their own destiny.

"But there is only one way of doing that. The world, and India with it, is held in the grip of delusion. And what is delusion? Nothing but opinions. Therefore it is opinions that hold India in subjection, and opinions must be changed. A beginning must be made where opinions are least hidebound and are therefore easiest to change. That means America.

"Therefore you two *sahibs* are chosen—" one who knows and loves India; one who knows and loves America.

"You two *sahibs* shall be convinced that there *is* knowledge that can change the very face of the world, and that it *is* within the reach of men. You shall not be taught that knowledge, for there are very few who are capable as yet of understanding it, and those who only half-understand it are either slain or driven mad, being at the mercy of the other half. You have a proverb that 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.' You shall be preserved from that little knowledge.

"Nevertheless, the duty laid on you is absolute. There can be no flinching from it. You are to go to America and convince Americans that India should be free to work out her own destiny. Americans will assert their changed opinion, and the world, England included, will follow suit. When India wins her freedom she will use it for the world, demonstrating her knowledge.

"You shall be shown, but seek not to discover! For, if once you learn a little of the science, forever forward you must go; and they who go forward before they are ready are doomed to madness or destruction.

"You can not disobey. You can not escape the will of destiny. But you can rush forward like moths to the flame, and perish. Against that I have warned you.

"Therefore follow, and see what you shall see."

He rose, exactly as he had sat down, without apparent muscular effort. It was as if a hand had taken him by the scalp and lifted him, except that I noticed his feet were pressed so hard against the floor that the blood left them, so that I think the secret of the trick was perfect muscular control, although how to attain that is another matter.

The Princess Yasmini made no offer to come with us, but lounged among the cushions reveling in mischievous enjoyment. Whatever the Gray Mahatma's real motive, there was no possible doubt about hers; she was looking forward to a tangible, material profit.

The Gray Mahatma led the way through the door by which we had entered, stalking along in his saffron robe without the slightest effort to seem dignified or solemn.

"Keep your wits about you," King whispered; and then again, presently: "Don't be fooled into thinking that anything you see is supernatural. Remember that whatever you see is simply the result of something that they know and that we don't. Keep your hair on! We're going to see some wonderful stuff or I'm a Dutchman."

King was excited, there was no question about that. He was hiding it from himself by warning me.

We passed down the long corridor outside Yasmini's room, but instead of continuing straight forward the Gray Mahatma found an opening behind a curtain in a wall whose thickness could be only guessed. Inside the wall was a stairway six feet wide that descended to an echoing, unfurnished hall below after making two turns inside solid masonry.

The lower hall was dark, but he found his way without difficulty, picking up a lantern from a corner on his way and then opening a door that gave, underneath the outer marble stairway, on to the court where the pool and the flowering shrubs were. The lantern was not lighted when he picked it up. I did not see how he lighted it. It was an ordinary oil lantern, apparently, with a wire handle to carry it by, and after he had carried it for half a minute it seemed to burn brightly of its own accord. I called King's attention to it.

"I've seen that done before," he answered, but he did not say whether or not he understood the trick of it.

Ismail came running to meet us the instant we showed ourselves, but stopped when he saw the Mahatma and, kneeling, laid the palms of both hands on his forehead on the stone flags. That was a strange thing for a Moslem to do—especially toward a Hindu—but the Mahatma took not the

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slightest notice of him and walked straight past as if he had not been there. He could hear King's footsteps and mine behind him, of course, and did not need to look back, but there was something almost comical in the way he seemed to ignore our existence and go striding along alone as if on business bent. He acted as little like a priest or a fakir or a fanatic as any man I have ever seen, and no picture-gallery curator or theater usher ever did the honors of the show with less attention to his own importance.

He led the way through the same bronze gate that we had entered by and never paused or glanced behind him until he came to the cage where the old black panther snarled behind the bars; and then a remarkable thing happened.

AT FIRST the panther began running backward and forward, as the caged brutes usually do when they think they are going to be fed; for all his age, he looked as full of fight as a newly caught young one, and his long yellow fangs flashed from under the curled lip—until the Mahatma spoke to him. He only said one word that I could hear, and I could not catch what the word was; but instantly the black brute slunk away to the corner of its cage farthest from the iron door, and at that the Mahatma opened the door without using any key that I detected. The padlock may have been a trick one, but I know this—it came away in his hands the moment he touched it.

Then at last he took notice of King and me again. He stood aside, and smiled, and motioned to us with his hand to enter the cage ahead of him. I have been several sorts of rash idiot in my time, and I daresay that King has too, for most of us have been young once; but I have also hunted panthers, and so has King, and to walk unarmed or even with weapons—into a black panther's cage is something that calls, I should say, for inexperience. The more you know about panthers the less likely you are to do it. It was almost pitch-dark; you could see the brute's yellow eyes gleaming, but no other part of him now, because he matched the shadows perfectly; but, being a cat, he could see us, and the odds against a man who should walk into that cage were, at a rough guess, ten trillion to one.

"Fear is the presence of death, and death is delusion. Follow me then," said the Mahatma.

He walked straight in, keeping the lighted lantern on the side of him farthest from the panther, whose claws I could hear scratching on the stone flags.

"Keep that light toward him for God's sake!" I urged, having myself had to use a lantern more than a score of times for protection at night against the big cats.

"Nay, it troubles his eyes. For God's sake I will hide it from him," the Mahatma answered. "We must not wait here."

"Come on," said King, and strode in through the open door. So I went in too, because I did not care to let King see me hesitate. Curiosity had vanished. I was simply in a blue funk, and rather angry as well at the absurdity of what we were doing.

The Gray Mahatma turned and shut the gate behind me, taking no notice at all of the black brute that crouched in the other corner, grumbling and moaning rather than growling.

Have you ever seen a panther spit and spring when a keeper shoved it out of the way with the cleaning rake? There is no beast in the world with whom it is more dangerous to play tricks. Yet in that dark corner, with the lantern held purposely so that it should not dazzle the panther's eyes, the Gray Mahatma stirred the beast with his toe and drove him away as carelessly and incautiously as you might shove your favorite dog aside! The panther crowded itself against the side of the cage and slunk away behind us—to the front of the cage that is to say, close by the padlocked gate—where he crouched again and moaned.

The dark, rear end of the cage was all masonry and formed part of the building behind it. In the right-hand corner, almost invisible from outside, was a narrow door of thick teak that opened very readily when the Mahatma fumbled with it, although I saw no lock, hasp or keyhole on the side toward us. We followed him through into a stone vault.

"And now there is need to be careful," he said, his voice booming and echoing along unseen corridors. "For though those here, who can harm you if they will, are without evil intention, nevertheless injury begets desire to injure. And do either of you know how to make acceptable explanations to a she-cobra whose young have been

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trodden on? Therefore walk with care, observing the lantern light and remembering that as long as you injure none, none will injure you."

At that he turned on his heel abruptly and walked forward, swinging the lantern so that its light swept to and fro. We were walking through the heart of masonry whose blocks were nearly black with age; there was a smell of ancient sepulchers, and in places the walls were damp enough to be green and slippery. Presently we came to the top of a flight of stone steps, each step being made of one enormous block and worn smooth by the sandalled traffic of centuries. It grew damper as we descended, and those great blocks were tricky things for a man in boots to walk on; yet the Gray Mahatma, swinging his lantern several steps below us, kept calling back:

"Have a care! Have a care! He who calls can do as much injury as he who jumps! Shall the injured inquire into reasons?"

We descended forty or fifty steps and I, walking last, had just reached the bottom, when something dashed between my feet, and another something flicked like a whip-lash after it. As the Mahatma swung the lantern I just caught sight of an enormous rat, close pursued by a six-foot snake, and after that we might as well have been in hell for all the difference it would have made to me.

I don't know how long that tunnel was, but I do know I am not going back there to measure it. It was nearly as big as the New York Subway, only built of huge stone blocks instead of concrete. The walls were damp, but there was no water on the floor, because deep drains ran parallel with the walls on either hand, and those drains in turn had round openings every yard or so to carry the water off. But there was not enough water, nor was there ever likely to be, to keep such a thorough system of drains employed, and it was out of those round holes that snakes and rats came. It seemed to be an inferno, in which cobras hunted rats perpetually; but we saw one swarm of fiery-eyed rats eating a dead snake.

THERE were baby cobras by the hundred—savage, six-inch things, and even smaller, that knew as much of evil, and could slay as surely, as the full-grown mother-snake that raised her hood and hissed us as we passed.

"Have a care! Have a care!" called the Gray Mahatma, swinging the lantern along ahead of us and himself seeming to walk with supreme carelessness.

"It is not enough to mean no harm. The snake-folk are afraid, and fear is the presence of death. Therefore walk carefully!"

The snakes seemed afraid of the Mahatma, and yet not afraid of him—much more careful to keep out from under his feet than ours, yet taking no other apparent notice of him, whereas hundreds of them raised their hoods and hissed at us. And though nothing touched him, at least fifty times rats and snakes raced over King's feet and mine, or slipped between our legs.

Maybe you like snakes. I can't even enjoy rats. The combination of the two in evil-smelling darkness amounts to about the sum-total of what I hope the next world will not be.

"This fellow has some use for us," King said over his shoulder. "He'll neither be killed himself, nor let us be if he can help it. This is no new trick. Lot's of 'em can manage snakes."

The Gray Mahatma, twenty yards ahead, heard every word of that. He stopped and let us come quite close up to him.

"Have you seen this?" he asked.

There was a cobra swinging its head about two and a half feet off the ground within a yard of him. He passed the lantern to me, and holding out both hands coaxed the venomous thing to come to him as you or I might coax a stray dog. It obeyed. It laid its head on his hands, lowered its hood, and climbed until, within six inches of his face, its head rested on his left shoulder.

"Would you like to try that?" he asked. "You can do it if you wish."

We did not wish, and while we stood there the infernal reptiles were swarming all around us, rising knee-high and swaying, with their forked tongues flashing in and out, but showing no inclination to use their fangs, although many of them raised their hoods. At one moment there were certainly fifty of the filthy things close enough to strike; and the bite of any one of them would have meant certain death within fifteen minutes.

However, they did not bite. The Gray Mahatma set down very gently the snake that had done his bidding, and then shooed

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the rest away; they backed off like a flock of foolish geese, hissing and swaying pretty much as geese do.

"Come!" he boomed. "Cobras are foolish people, and folly is infectious. Come away!"

CHAPTER VI

"The Pool of Terrors."

WE CAME soon to another flight of steps made of gigantic blocks of stone older than history, and groping our way up those we followed the Gray Mahatma to a gallery at the top, on the other side of which was a sheer drop and the smell of stagnant water. I could hear something sluggish that moved in the water, and somewhere in the distance was a turning, around which light found its way so dimly that it hardly looked like light at all, but more like filmy mist. A heavy monster splashed somewhere beneath us and the Mahatma raised the lantern to peer into our faces.

"Those are *mugger**. You may see them now if you would rather. The same as with the snakes, the rule is you must do them no harm."

But King and I were yearning for light and fresh air, with throats too parched by various emotions to be able to speak plainly; and apparently the Gray Mahatma took no particular pleasure in our discomfort—not much more, I should say, than a dentist does in the discomfort of a patient whom he inevitably has to cause to suffer for a while.

He looked at us keenly, as if making sure that we really were not enjoying ourselves, and then leaned his weight against an iron door in a corner. It swung open, and we followed him through into a pitch-dark chamber of some kind. But the door we came in by had hardly slammed behind us when a bright light broke through a square hole in the ceiling and displayed a flight of rock-hewn steps. Some one overhead had removed a stone plug from the hole.

The Mahatma motioned to King to go first, but as King refused he led the way again, going through the square hole overhead as handily as any seaman swinging himself into the cross-trees. King followed him and I stood on the top step with head and shoulders through the opening surveying the prospect before scrambling up after him—not that I would have gone back by the way we had come for all the treasure in Asia. But I did not want to go forward either, now that I had seen.

I was looking between King's legs. The light came from three large wood-fires placed over at the left end of a rectangular chamber hewn out of solid rock. The chamber was at least a hundred feet long, and thirty wide; its roof was lost in smoke, but seemed to be irregular, as if the walls of a natural cavern had been shaped by masons who left the high roof as they found it.

A very nearly naked man with a long beard, hair over his shoulders, and the general air of being some one in authority, was walking about with nothing in his hand except a seven-jointed bamboo cane. He was a very old man, but of magnificent physique and ribbed up like a race-horse in training. His principal business seemed to be the supervision of several absolutely naked individuals, who carried in wood through a dark gap in the wall and piled it on the three fires at the farther end with almost ludicrous precision.

And between the three fires, not spitted and not bound but absolutely motionless, there sat a human being, so dried out that not even that fierce heat could wring a drop of sweat from him, yet living, for you could see him breathe and the firelight shone on his living, yet unwinking eyes. Every draft of air that he drew into his lungs must have scorched him. Every single hair had disappeared from his body. And while we watched they came and fed him, one of the naked minions who had carried fuel bringing him about an egg-cup-full of water and a dozen grains of cooked rice, feeding him with a long spoon on the end of a stick because the heat would not let him draw nearer. The human salamander swallowed what was given him without the slightest unnecessary movement and made no sign of recognition or appreciation.

If he had been the only person undergoing voluntary torture in that rock chamber, perhaps one could have endured it without much mental reaction, for, after all, it was his body he was roasting.

But he was only one of many, all undergoing torture in its most hideous and useless forms, and all as free as he was to deliver themselves if they saw fit. The

*Alligators.

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least offensive was a man within six feet of me who sat on a conical stone no bigger than a cocoanut; that small stone was resting on top of a cone of rock about a yard high, in such fashion that it rocked at the slightest change of balance; the man's legs were crossed, however, exactly as if he were squatting on the floor—although they actually rested on nothing; and his arms had been crossed behind his back for so long, and held so steadily, that the fingernails of the right hand had grown through the left arm biceps, and vice versa. He, too, was fed with drops of water and about a dozen grains of rice—every second day, as the Mahatma told us afterward.

Space was at a premium in that gruesome madhouse. Close beside the fellow on the rocking stone there hung two ropes from rings in the roof. There were iron hooks on their lower ends, and these were passed through the back muscles of another naked man, who kept himself swinging by touching the floor with one toe. The muscles were so drawn by his weight that they formed loops several inches long and had turned to dry gristle; the strain had had some effect on one of his legs, for it was curled up under him and apparently useless, but the other, with which he toed the floor to swing himself, was apparently all right. His hands were folded over his breast, and his beard and hair hung like seaweed.

Near him again there was an arrangement like a medieval rack, only that instead of having a wheel or a lever the cords were drawn by heavy weights. A man lay on it with arms and legs stretched out toward its corners so tightly that his body did not touch the underlying strut; and he had been so long in that position that his hands and feet were dead from the pressure of the cords, and his limbs were stretched several inches beyond their normal length. In proof that his torture, too, was voluntary, he was balancing a round stone on his solar plexus that could have been much more easily dumped than kept in place.

IT WAS a museum of horrors. Torquemada's Inquisition could not have surpassed it. There was one man standing on the rigidly extended fingers of both hands with his feet in the air and his nose about six inches away from a piece of decaying carrion. Another man was standing on one leg with the other leg twisted around his neck and his hands clasped behind him. There were between sixty and seventy inmates, and the only ones not undergoing voluntary torture were the priest in charge of the disgusting place and the naked hellions who carried out his orders.

None of the self-immolated victims took notice of us; they were too far advanced toward paradise to pay attention to such intruding trash. But the priest and his hellions were different; their sanctity was second-hand at best and only to be preserved by keeping that sanctuary inviolate. From their view-point King and I were the foulest intruders imaginable, unclean, untouchable, unteachable, damned and damning all on whom our very shadows fell.

The priest stared questioningly at the Gray Mahatma, glancing from him to us and back again. The naked hellions came herding down on us—ten or eleven of them—lacking only tails to make them look like red, story-book devils, flourishing the iron poles with which they tended the torture fires. I guess it would have only needed a nod from the Gray Mahatma to put an end to King's career and mine. However, the Gray Mahatma shook his head instead of nodding.

He beckoned King and me and led the way between the shuddersome, self-immolated, twisted wrecks of humanity to an opening in the far wall, through which we passed into another chamber carved out of the rock, not so large as the first and only lighted by a charcoal brazier that gave off as much fumes as flame. The fitful, bluish light fell on a stone ledge, in a niche like a sepulcher, carved in one wall, and on that ledge a man lay who had every muscle of his body pierced with thorns; his tongue protruded between his teeth, and was held there by a thorn thrust through it; and there were thorns stuck into his flesh wherever they could be made to add to his discomfort.

The Gray Mahatma stood and looked at him, and smiled.

"Just a presumptuous fool!" he said pleasantly. "This was the most presumptuous of them all, but they all suffer for the same offense. Take warning! They could walk away if they cared to. They are here of what they think is their free will. They are moths who sought the flame, some from curiosity, some from desire, some craving adoration for themselves, all for one false

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reason or another. This fate might be yours—so take warning!"

Never having practised any worse self-torture than is entailed by getting into patent-leather shoes and a high hat and calling on the President or somebody, it may be that I smiled. I was willing to bet with him that never, in any circumstances, for whatever cause, would I do any of those gruesome stunts. But he seemed to think he knew better.

"There is not one of these who was not warned," he said quietly. "They were cautioned not to inquire into matters too deep for them. They were here to be taught; but that little knowledge that is such a dangerous thing tempted them too swiftly forward beyond their depth, so that now—you see them. They seek to get rid of material bodies and to satisfy themselves that death is a delusion; and so common is their error, and so ancient, that no man can pass for a holy one nowadays among the populace without he mortifies the flesh in some such way, or at least pretends to.

"Even I, who would scorn such foolishness, must smear myself with ashes and look like an ascetic before the mob will listen to me. There is only one folly as great as that of the mob, and that is the folly of them who deceive the mob, because deception multiplies itself and gathers both deceiver and deceived into its vortex. Bear me witness that I am not deceiving you. I warn you. You revolt at the sight of these self-tortured fools; yet I tell you that, should you commit the same offense, you would behave as they, even as the moth that goes too near the flame. Take care lest curiosity overwhelm you."

"All right, lead along," King answered rather testily. "I've seen worse than this a hundred times. I've seen the women."

The Mahatma nodded gravely.

"But not even I may lead you forward clothed as you are," he said. "I am about to reveal such mysteries as set presumptuous fools to seeking perfection by a too short route. Even I would be slain, if I tried to introduce you in that garb. Undress."

He set us the example; but as we were not qualified by years of arduously won sanctity to stand stark naked in the presence he conceded us a clout apiece torn from a filthy length of calico that some one had tossed in a corner. And he tore another piece of filthy red cotton cloth in halves, and divided it between us to twist around our heads. King laughed at me.

"You look like a fine, fat Bengali," he said. "If your stomach was only bigger and your chest more hairy a man might safely swear you were born within smell of Calcutta!"

King himself looked like an athletic, northern native of the country now that his smooth, straight hair was covered. If all the stories told about him were true, it is nothing out of the way for him to pass himself off as some kind of Indian tribesman for weeks at a stretch; however, according to him, I was accomplishing by mere bulk and awkwardness as much as he could contrive by painstaking art.

The Mahatma called to one of the naked hellions to bring ashes in a brass bowl. Through the opening we watched him rake them out from under the fires, shake water on them, and mix them into paste as casually as if the business were part of his regular routine. The Mahatma took the bowl from him and plastered King and me liberally with the stuff, making King look like a scabrous fanatic, and I don't doubt I looked worse, having more acreage of anatomy. Last of all he put some on himself, but only here and there, as if his sanctity only demanded a little piecing out. Then he raised a flagstone in one corner of the chamber that swung easily on pivots set in sockets in the masonry, and led the way again.

Have you ever paused to consider what a stark-naked archbishop would look like? Well, that was the general idea, only that no archbishop since the world began ever claimed such sanctity as is conceded to an Indian Mahatma. His was the absolute simplicity of naked righteousness and, be it understood, ninety-nine and two-thirds per cent pure self-righteousness at that. But naked, just a few steps higher up and backside to, you could hardly have told the difference between him and any well-developed masculine sinner.

WE WERE evidently in a system of caves that had been quarried into shape centuries before the Christian era. They seemed originally to have been bubbles and blow-holes in volcanic rock, and to have been connected together by piercing the walls between them. There was certainly no intelligible plan attached

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to their arrangement, for we went first up, then down, then sideways, losing all sense of elevation and direction. But we passed through at least three score of those connected blow-holes, and the air in some of the higher ones was so foul that breathing it made you weak at the knees. Nevertheless, in every single one there was an anchorite of some kind, engaged in painful meditation. In each cave was an infinitesimal lamp made of baked clay and fed with vegetable oil that provided more smoke than flame, and the walls and ceiling were deep with the soot of centuries.

Following the Gray Mahatma's example King and I took handfuls of the soot and smeared it on our breasts, stomachs and faces, to mingle with the ashes in a mask of holiness—which seems to be synonymous with dirt in ever so many climes. By the time we had finished that there was not much chance of any one mistaking us for anything but two half-crazed aspirants for sanctity. Examining King by the light of one of those flickering lamps I had hard work to believe that he was the same man who had walked beside me through the streets in uniform, and he laughed at me silently.

I could not possibly have drawn a tracing of our course, for it was rank bewildering; but we emerged at last under the stars by the side of a great stone tank. It might have been a bathing pool, for along each side steps disappeared into the water. We could dimly distinguish one end on our right hand with a row of great graven gods all reflected in the water; but the other end vanished through a black cave-mouth. It was about a hundred and twenty feet wide from bank to bank, and between us and the steps that faced us on the far side, in among the quivering star-reflections, I could count the snouts of eighteen alligators. The Mahatma appeared to be counting them too, for he paused above the water motionless.

"Which way now?" King asked him a shade suspiciously.

"Forward," he answered, with a note of surprize.

But if that Mahatma supposed that a coat of soot and ashes provided either King or me with a satisfactory reason for hob-nobbing with alligators in their home pool, he was emphatically mistaken. We objected simultaneously, unanimously, and right out aloud in meeting.

"Suit yourself," said I. "This suits me here."

"Go forward if you like," said King, "we'll wait for you."

The Gray Mahatma turned and eyed us solemnly but not unkindly.

"If I should leave you here," he said, "a much worse fate would overtake you than any that you anticipate, for your minds are not advanced enough to imagine the horrors that assail all those who lack courage. There are no backward steps. There may be no dallying. With me you are safe, if only you remember to intend no injury and to do none. Why should you fear? Shall I lead into peril of which I am not master? This is the testing place for aspirants, and more win their way across it than you might suppose, impudence of ambition adding skill to recklessness. All must make the attempt, alone and at night, who seek the inner shrines of Knowledge, and those creatures in the tank have no other food than is thus provided.

"Those whose courage failed them are now such fakirs as we have seen, who now seek to rid themselves of materiality, which is the cause of fear, by ridding themselves of their fleshy envelop. That is impossible, yet it is equally impossible to persuade them otherwise; and as each man has the right to strive with destiny in his own way, who shall account himself their judge? Somehow they must overcome fear; it is an act of merit to assist them in the fashion of their own desiring. At least the half of those, who elect themselves, turn backward at this testing place. But since you two were chosen, and have no presumptuous craving for knowledge beyond your reach, you are provided with a safe guide, and need not fear at all. Follow me, then."

He stepped down into the water, and at once it became evident that to all intents and purposes there were two tanks, the division between them lying about eighteen inches under water. But the division was neither straight nor exactly level. It zig-zagged this and that way like the key-track in a maze, and was more beset with slippery pitfalls than a mussel-shoal at low tide.

King followed the Mahatma in, and I came last, so I had the benefit of two pilots, as well as the important task of holding King whenever he groped his way forward with one foot. For the Mahatma went a great deal faster than we cared to follow,

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so that although he had shown us the way we were still doubtful of our footing. At intervals he would pause and turn and look at us, and every time he did that those long, loathsome snouts would ripple toward him like spokes of a wheel, but he took no more notice of them than if they had been water-rats. They seemed more interested in him than in us.

There were seven sharp turns in that underwater causeway, and the edges of each turn were slippery slopes, up which an alligator certainly could climb, but that afforded not the least chance to a man whose foot once stepped too far and slid. And not only were there unexpected turns at differing intervals, but there were gaps in the causeway of a yard or so in at least a dozen places, and the edges of those gaps were smooth and rounded, as if purposely designed to dump all wayfarers into the very jaws of the waiting reptiles. It was in just such places as that that they began to gather and wait patiently, with their awful yellow eyes just noticeable in the starlight.

KING and I were standing on one such rounded guessing-place, swearing fitfully, he in English and I in plain United States American; and if there was one, there were a dozen alligators waiting with their snouts within a yard of us, we utterly at their mercy. And I don't know why they did not attack. There was nothing between us and them, and our naked legs were in the water.

The Mahatma, twenty yards away, was taking his time about turning to give us directions, and one great fifteen foot brute had raised itself on the causeway behind us and was snapping its jaws together like a pair of vicious castanets. It looked exactly like the end of King and me, and no pleasant end either; and I suppose because fear laid hold of my bowels with a grip like a Harpy's hand, I elected to die telling the Mahatma what I thought of him.

"Nero and Caligula were Christian gentlemen compared to you!" I called out.

King chuckled. He wasn't quite as scared as I was. Panic had hold of me for the first time since I could remember, and it was as much shame at my own mental condition as anything else that made me rail at the Mahatma; but he was not in the least offended by it.

"You are fortunate," he boomed back. "You have starlight and a guide. Those who are not chosen have to find their way—or fail—alone under a cloudy sky. There is none to hold *them* while they grope; there is none to care whether they succeed or not, save only the *mugger* that desires a meal. Nevertheless, there are some of them who succeed, so how should you fail? Take a step to the left now—a long one, each holding the other, then another to the left—then to the right again."

"Curse you!" I shouted back, staring over King's shoulder. "There's a *mugger's* head between us and the next stepping-stone!"

"Nay!" he answered. "That *is* the stepping-stone. Set your foot on it. It is there to test the courage of those who come alone."

I could have sworn he was lying, but King set his foot on it and in a moment more we were working our way cautiously along the causeway again, making for the next sharp corner where the Mahatma had been standing to give us the direction. But he never waited for us to catch up with him. I think he suspected that in panic we might clutch him and offer violence, and he always moved on as we approached, leaving us to grope our way in agonies of apprehension.

The going did not become easier as we progressed. Whoever laid that causeway must have designed it to scare the wits out of unfortunates who ventured on it; and I guessed at last why the alligators did not trouble to attack. They were so absolutely sure that we would fall in!

That was a lovely discovery. It made it all the more interesting to observe the ripples as their long snouts followed us inch by inch. When the Gray Mahatma reached the steps on the far side and stood out of the water waiting for us, all the monsters that had watched his progress came and joined our party; and now, instead of keeping to the water, two of them climbed up on the causeway, so that there was one of the creatures behind us and two in front. To right and left there were dozens of them swimming; and they look worse in the dark than the daylight, because you can only see their yellow eyes and part of a vague outline, the rest being left to your imagination, which is guaranteed to work perfectly under those conditions.

"Call off your cousins and your uncles and your aunts!" I shouted, bearing in mind the Hindu creed that consigns the souls of

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unrighteous men to the bodies of animals in retribution for their sins. "—— you! If I ever get ashore I'll make you pay for this!"

I was never more terrified in my life, and although King did not say anything I could feel him trembling. A terror-born thought occurred to me that it might be possible to slay a *mugger* by wrenching its jaws apart. I have read somewhere of that being done, and a man thinks of crazy chances in a predicament like that.

However, the eventual solution was the craziest of all. The Gray Mahatma picked up a short pole from the embankment, and returned into the water with it, not striking out right and left as any ordinary-minded person would have done, but shoving the brutes away gently one by one, as if they were logs or small boats. And even so, they followed us so closely that they climbed the steps abreast of us.

But I'm willing to bet that there is not an alligator living that can catch me once my feet are set on hard ground, and I can say the same for King; we danced up those steps together like a pair of fauns emerging from a forest pool—satyrs might be the better word; I know I felt abominably naked, for goose-flesh made me acutely conscious of every inch of skin.

Then the Gray Mahatma came and peered into our faces, and asked an extraordinary question. If he had been any sort of ordinary individual he would have been afraid to come near me, for I had threatened him and had not had nearly enough time to recover equanimity.

"Do you feel proud?" he asked, looking keenly from one to the other of us.

That was a fine question to ask an ex-big-game-hunter and a V. C. man, both of whom had been in a panic less than a hundred seconds before! Every individual hair of my whole body was still bristling on end. I never felt less proud.

"Because," he went on to explain, "you have now crossed the Pool of Terrors, and they are not so many who accomplish that. Fewer than the half of those who try. The *muggers* are well fed. And those who reach to this side are usually proud, believing they now have the secret key to the attainment of all Knowledge. You are going to see now what becomes of the proud ones."

However, enough is sufficient of anything. It was bad to be marching through the panorama naked, with a bacchanalian red turban twisted on one side of my head; anything further added on top of that indignity was going to be too much for a reasonable man like me, and I said so.

"I'm not enjoying your entertainment," I told him. "I'll have a rain check, please."

For once I had taken him out of his depth, and he did not understand me.

"Rain?" he said. "Control of the weather is one of the last things even the Mahatma learns. Few indeed have risen to that height. Beware of presumption, and follow me."

FORTUNATELY it was a hot night, so the lack of clothing did not inconvenience us, except for the disgrace of it. I had a feeling in the small of my back that Yasmini was watching us from some upper-story window, and would joke me afterwards about my large physique.

King was not enjoying the proceedings any more than I was, but he was saying nothing, and had plainly made his mind up to see the thing through for the sake of what he might learn, whereas I was mentally cursing Meldrum Strange and wishing him, not in my shoes, for I hadn't any and my feet were getting sore, but in my skin of soot and ashes.

The Mahatma led us forward toward a long, dark shadow that transformed itself into a temple wall as we drew closer, and in a moment we were once more groping our way downward amid prehistoric foundation stones, with bats flitting past us and a horrible feeling possessing me, at least, that the worst was yet to come.

The hunch proved accurate. We came into an enormous crypt that evidently underlay a temple. Great pillars of natural rock, practically square and twenty feet thick, supported the roof, which was partly of natural rock and partly of jointed masonry. There was nothing in the crypt itself, except one old gray-beard, who sat on a mat by a piece of candle, reading a roll of manuscript; and he did not trouble to look up—did not take the slightest notice of us.

But around the crypt there were more cells than I could count off-hand. Some were dark. There were lights burning in others. Each had an iron door with a few holes in it, and a small square window, unglazed and unbarred, cut in the natural rock. Enough light came through some of those square holes to suffuse the whole crypt dimly.

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"None but an aspirant has ever entered here," said the Gray Mahatma. "Even when India was conquered, no enemy penetrated this place. You stand on forbidden ground."

He turned to the left and opened an iron cell door by simply pushing it; there did not seem to be any lock. He did not announce himself, but walked straight in, and we followed him. The cell was about ten feet by twelve, with a stone ledge wide enough to sleep on running along one side, and lighted by an oil lamp that hung by chains from the hewn roof. There were three bearded, middle-aged men, almost naked, squatting on one mat facing the stone ledge, one of whom held an ancient manuscript that all three were consulting; and on the stone ledge sat what once had been a man before those devils caught him.

The three looked up at the Gray Mahatma curiously, but did not challenge. I suppose his nakedness was his passport. They eyed King and me with a butcher's-eye appraisal, nodded and resumed their consultation of the hand-written roll. The characters on it looked like Sanskrit.

The Gray Mahatma faced the creature on the stone ledge, and spoke to King and me in English.

"That," he said, "is one of those who crossed the Pool of Terrors and became insane with pride. Consider him. He entered here demanding knowledge, having only the desire and not the honesty. But since there is no way backward and even failure must subserve the universal cause, he was given knowledge and it made him what you see. Now these, who know a little and would learn more, make use of him as a subject for experiments. They have in that manuscript secrets whose existence is suspected by the psycho-analysts of Europe and America, and now they study how the human mind reacts to this and that interference.

"That thing, who was once a man, can imagine himself a bird, or a fish, or an animal—or even an insensate graven stone—at their command. When he is no more fit to be studied he will imagine himself to be a *mugger*, and will hurry into the tank with the other reptiles, and that will be the end of him. Come."

We entered cell after cell, and in some of them experiments were being made in the dark that are too cruel to be set down. It beggared credulity, and at last even King lost his self-control and turned on the Gray Mahatma as we followed him from a dark cell out into the crypt, where the one old gray-beard sat reading peacefully.

"You must be as mad as any of these poor devils to show me this!" he exclaimed. "I'll have the Government investigate this place within twenty-four hours!"

The Gray Mahatma turned and smiled at him, without amusement, but with a sort of pitying compassion.

"There are two answers to that," he said quietly. "The Government would not believe you—no, not even you; and if it did believe it would not dare, because this place is a temple, which is to say a sanctuary. And in the second place, you will never leave our custody until we are sure of you beyond a trace of doubt. No, my brother, I am very far from mad; but you would go mad if you were to contemplate betraying us."

I felt like going mad that minute. I sat down on the rock floor and held my head to make sure that I still had it. I wanted to think of something that would give me back my grip on sanity and the good, clean, concrete world outside; I don't think I could have done it if King had not seen and applied the solution. He kicked me in the ribs as hard as he could with his naked foot, and, that failing, used his fist.

"Get up!" he said. "Hit me, if you want to!"

Then he turned on the Mahatma.

"—— you! Take us out of this!"

"Peace! Peace!" said the Gray Mahatma. "You are chosen. You are needed for another purpose. No harm shall come to either of you. There is one more cell that you must enter."

"No!" said I, and I met his eye squarely. "I've seen my fill of these sights. Lead the way out!"

"The arrogance of human strength!" he answered.

He did not appear in the least afraid of me; merely curious, as if he were viewing an experiment. I made up my mind on the instant to experiment on my own account, and swung my fist back for a full-powered smash at him. I let go, too. But the blow fell on King, who stepped between us, and knocked nearly all the wind out of him.

"None o' that!" he gasped. "Let's see this through."

The Gray Mahatma patted him gently on the shoulder.

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"Good!" he said. "Very good. You did well!"

CHAPTER VII

"There. Are you satisfied?"

THE Gray Mahatma ignored my effort at violence as absolutely, say, as an Ellis Island immigrant inspector would ignore the protestations of a Lithuanian who had to be deloused, and led the way toward one of the great square pillars that supported a portion of the roof at a point where the natural rock met jointed masonry. Up to that point I think he viewed my ill-temper entirely tolerantly.

In that pillar there was an opening, about six feet high and barely wide enough for a man of my build to squeeze himself through, but once inside it there was ample space and a stairway, hewn in the stone, wound upward geometrically. Still swinging the lantern he had brought with him from Yasmini's palace he led the way up that, and we followed, I last as usual.

We emerged through a wooden door into a temple, whose walls were almost entirely hidden by enormous images of India's gods. One four-headed, squatting monster was set against the end wall, facing what was presumably the temple door; but you could not see the door, because there was a carved stone screen that intercepted not only the view but most of the light as well. There were no windows.

The resulting gloom was punctuated by dots of yellow light that came from hanging brass lamps, whose smoke in the course of centuries had covered everything with soot that it was nobody's business to remove. So it looked like a coal-black pantheon, and in the darkness you could hardly see the forms of long-robed men who were mumbling through some sort of ceremony.

"Those," said the Gray Mahatma, "are *priests*."

The word was acrid. Apparently a priest, to him, was the living representative of all that ought to be despised. He made one gesture that included the thirty or forty tremendous images:

"Men have forgotten what these things mean," he said, "and these priests perpetuate forgetfulness. They receive payment to pray for people who may not enter lest their sinfulness defile the sanctuary."

There was only one consideration that prevented me from looking for a door behind that screen and bidding the Mahatma a discourteous farewell, and that was the prospect of walking through the streets with nothing on but a dish-rag and a small red turban. I have never done that, and the unconventional things that you haven't done are what look out of the question.

However, the Gray Mahatma, as naked as the day he was born, led the way to the screen, opened a hinged door in it and beckoned us through; and we emerged, instead of into the street as I expected, into a marvelous courtyard bathed in moonlight, for the moon was just appearing over the roof of what looked like another temple at the rear.

All around the courtyard was a portico, supported by pillars of most wonderful workmanship; and the four walls within the portico were subdivided into open compartments, in each of which was the image of a different god. In front of each image hung a lighted lamp, whose rays were reflected in the idol's jeweled eyes; but the only people visible were three or four sleepy looking attendants in turbans and cotton loin-cloths, who sat up and stared at us without making any other sign of recognition.

In the very center of the courtyard was a big, square platform built of stone, with a roof like a canopy supported on carved pillars similar to those that supported the portico, which is to say that each one was different, and yet all were so alike as to blend into architectural harmony—repetition without monotony. The Gray Mahatma led the way up steps on to the platform, and waited for us at a square opening in the midst of its floor, beside which lay a stone that obviously fitted the hole exactly. There were no rings to lift the stone by from the outside, but there were holes drilled through it from side to side through which iron bolts could be passed from underneath.

Down that hole we went in single file again, the Gray Mahatma leading, treading an oval stairway interminably until I daresay we had descended more than a hundred feet. The air was warm, but breathable and there seemed to be plenty of it, as if some efficient means of artificial ventilation had been provided; nevertheless, it was nothing else than a cavern that we were exploring, and though there were traces of

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chisel and adze work on the walls, the only masonry was the steps.

We came to the bottom at last in an egg-shaped cave, in the center of which stood a rock, roughly hewn four-square; and on that rock, exactly in the middle, was a lingam of black, polished marble, illuminated by a brass lamp hanging overhead. The Mahatma eyed it curiously:

"That," he said, "is the last symbol of ignorance. The remainder is knowledge."

There were doors on every side of that egg-shaped cave, each set cunningly into a natural fold of rock, so that they seemed to have been inset when it was molten, in the way that nuts are set into chocolate—pushed into place by a pair of titanic thumbs. And at last we seemed to have reached a place where the Gray Mahatma might not enter uninvited, for he selected one of the doors after a moment's thought, and knocked. He knocked with dignity, and an air of more or less command, but none the less he knocked and waited, setting his lantern down irreverently on the altar of the lingam.

Nobody hurried to answer him. We were kept waiting there for several minutes, but he did not knock again. King whispered to me:

"That's the simplest, oldest formula in the world. An unauthorized intruder would knock a second time, and they would know enough not to open to him."

King was right. The Mahatma had overheard him.

"Whoever knocked a second time would die instantly," he remarked.

We stood there for possibly ten minutes, the Mahatma seeming satisfied with his own meditation, and we not caring to talk lest he should overhear us.

AT LAST the door opened, not cautiously, but suddenly and wide, and a man stood square in it who filled it up from frame to frame—a big-eyed, muscular individual in loin-cloth and turban, who looked too proud to assert his pride. He stood with arms folded and a smile on his firm mouth; and the impression he conveyed was that of a master-craftsman, whose skill was his life, and whose craft was all he cared about.

He eyed the Mahatma without respect or flinching, and said nothing. He did not even raise his eyebrows in the unvoiced question; and if there had not been a flood of light behind him he might have passed for a statue carved in the rock.

Have you ever watched two wild animals meet, stand looking at each other, and suddenly go off together without a sign of an explanation? That was what happened. The man in the doorway presently turned his back and led the way in, and neither word nor visible signal had been exchanged. If he and the Gray Mahatma had talked it was not in any normal language; they must have had means of communicating that were inaudible as well as invisible.

The Gray Mahatma signed to us to follow the man through the door, and King went forward instantly, much too full of scientific curiosity to trouble about caution in a place where safety probably did not exist. But my scientific curiosity is tempered by a host of qualifying motives, and I signed to the Mahatma to go next, not caring to have him behind me. He scowled and conceded the point; but I think it was from that moment that he ceased to be tolerant of me.

From then on I sensed a subtle change in his attitude. He was no longer polite, but he was also indifferent as to what I might do; he continued to shepherd King extremely carefully, as if everything depended on preserving him from accident, but apparently I had his permission to destroy myself as swiftly as I cared to.

The passage we entered was just exactly wide enough for me to pass along with elbows touching either wall. It was high; there was plenty of air in it; it was as scrupulously clean as a hospital ward. On either hand there were narrow wooden doors, spaced about twenty feet apart, every one of them closed; there were no bolts on the outside of the doors, and no keyholes, but I could not move them by shoving against them as I passed.

The extraordinary circumstance was the light. The whole passage was bathed in light, yet I could not detect where it came from. It was not dazzling like electricity. No one place seemed brighter than another, and there were no shadows. The light seemed to come upward from the floor every bit as much as downward from the roof, yet from end to end of that long passage—about two hundred feet—there was nothing that suggested any explanation of the light; in fact, the effect was as if they had caught light in some kind of container and turned

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it loose again down below there! The walls were not luminous; I was satisfied of that, for I could make a shadow on them anywhere by using both hands in a cup-shape and holding them very close indeed to the surface, but even so, it was not a deep shadow.

"How do you get the light? Where does it come from?" I demanded, forgetting the Mahatma's injunction to ask no questions.

"From the same place you came from before your mother made your acquaintance!" the Mahatma answered over his shoulder, and King glanced back with a smile of sheer delight. He was beginning to enjoy himself.

The end of the passage forked at a perfect right angle, and there were doors at the end of each arm of the fork. Our guide turned to the right. He, King and the Mahatma passed through a door that seemed to open at the slightest touch, and the instant the Mahatma's back had passed the door-frame I found myself in darkness.

I had hung back a little, trying to make shadows with my hands to discover the direction of the light; and the strange part was that I could see bright light in front of me through the open door, but none of it came out into the passage. There was no half-light anywhere; no grade between light and darkness; where the one began the other left off, and the plane between them was as straight as a sheet of window-glass.

It was intuition that caused me to pause at the threshold before following the others through. Something about the suddenness with which the light had ceased in the passage the moment the Mahatma's back was past the door, added to curiosity, made me stop and consider that plane where the light left off. Having no other instrument available, I took off my turban and flapped it to and fro, to see whether I could produce any effect on that astonishing dividing line, and for about the ten thousandth time in a somewhat strenuous career it was intuition and curiosity that saved me.

THE instant the end of the turban touched the plane between light and darkness it caught fire; or rather, I should say fire caught it, and the fire was so intense and swift that it burned off that part of the turban without damaging the rest. In other words, there was a plane of unimaginably active heat between me and the rest of the party—of such extraordinary heat that it functioned only on that plane (for I could not feel it with my hand from an inch away); and I being in pitch darkness while they were in golden light, the others could not see me.

They could hear, however, and I called to King. I told him what had happened, and then showed him, by throwing what was left of the turban toward him. It got exactly as far as the plane between light and darkness, and then vanished in a silent flash so swiftly and completely as to leave no visible charred fragment.

I could see all three men standing in line facing in my direction, hardly ten feet away, and it was difficult to remember that they could not see me at all—or at any rate that King could not; the others may have had some trained sixth sense that made it possible.

"Come forward!" said the Gray Mahatma. "We three came by. Why should it harm you?"

King sized up the situation instantly. If they intended to kill me and keep him alive, that would not be with his permission or connivance, and he stepped forward suddenly toward me.

"Stop!" commanded the Mahatma, showing the first trace of excitement that he had yet betrayed, but King kept on, and I suppose that the man who was acting showman did something, because King crossed the line without anything happening and then stood with one foot on each side of the threshold while I crossed.

"There are two of us in this!" he said to the Gray Mahatma then. "You can't kill one and take the other."

"Who are you that dogmatize about a negative?" asked the Mahatma with quiet amusement. "You are like the man who saw a bridge fall down and said that the river was forever more impassable!"

"I daresay you heard what I told you, all the same!" King answered, and the Gray Mahatma laughed—one quick, short, scornful "Hah!"

"You'd better stick close," advised King, and we two naked, ash-smeared adventurers took the next half-dozen paces arm-in-arm.

WE WERE in a chamber roughly fifty feet square, whose irregular corners were proof enough that it had been originally another of those huge blow-holes in volcanic stone; the roof, too,

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had been left rough, but the greater part of the side-walls had been finished off smooth with the chisel, and hand-rubbed. The whole chamber was bathed in agreeable golden light that came from no opening or appliance that I could see; the air seemed fresh, but I could detect no ventilation shaft; and everywhere was scrupulous cleanliness.

"This man," said the Gray Mahatma, speaking to King and ignoring me, "is the keeper of the secret of long vision."

There was a big, rectangular rock exactly in the middle of the room, shaped like a table or an altar, and polished until it shone. It did not look like a tomb or anything held sacred, and as there was no other furniture in the chamber I decided to sit down on it—whereat the Mahatma ceased to ignore me.

"Fool!" he barked. "Keep off that!"

Well: Any man who will save my carcass from being burned while I'm yet using it has my permission to call me any name he pleases. But I was puzzled to understand why the Gray Mahatma should seek to kill me one minute, and to prevent me from being killed the next. I tore a piece off the rag I was wearing for a loin-cloth and tossed it on the polished surface of the stone. It vanished instantly and left no trace; it did not even leave a mark on the stone, and the burning was so swift and complete that there was no smell.

"Thanks!" I said. "But why your sudden anxiety on my account? Have you decided after all that you want me alive?"

"I am no maker of decisions," the Gray Mahatma answered. "It is not I, who decree death. They die who can not face the light. But shall a fly from the wheel foul the mirror?"

He turned to King again.

"You have seen the *camera obscura* that shows in darkness the scenery near at hand, provided the sun is shining? The *camera obscura* is a feeble imitation of the true idea. There are no limits to the vision of him who understands true science. What city do you wish to see?"

"Benares," King answered.

Instantly the light went out. I don't pretend to know how it was done. Nobody turned any switch that I could see, and there was no sound of mechanism. Suddenly we were in darkness. Equally suddenly the whole top surface of the stone table became bathed in light of a different quality—light like daylight, that perhaps came upward from the stone, but if so came only a little way. To me it looked much more as if it began suddenly in mid-air and descended toward the surface of the stone.

And there all at once, as clearly as if we saw it on the focusing screen of a gigantic camera, lay Benares spread before us, with all its color, its sacred cattle in the streets, its crowds bathing in the Ganges, temples, domes, trees, movement—almost the smell of Benares was there, for the suggestion was all-inclusive.

"But why is it daylight in Benares while it's somewhere near midnight here?" King demanded.

That instant the sunshine in Benares ceased and the moon and stars came out. The glow of lamps shone forth from the temple courtyards, and down by the river ghats were the lurid crimson flame and smoke where they cremated dead Hindus. It was far more perfect than a motion picture. Allowing for scale it looked actually real.

Suddenly the chamber was all suffused in golden light once more and the picture on the granite table vanished.

"Name another city," said the Gray Mahatma.

"London," King answered.

The light went out, and there sure enough was London—first the Strand, crowded with motor-buses; then Ludgate Hill and St. Paul's; then the Royal Exchange and Bank of England; then London Bridge and the Tower Bridge and a panorama of the Thames.

"Are you satisfied?" the Gray Mahatma asked, and once again the cavern was flooded with that peculiarly restful golden light, while the picture on the granite table disappeared.

"Not a bit," King answered. "It's a trick of some sort."

"Is wireless telegraphy a trick then?" retorted the Mahatma. "If so, then yes; so this is. Only this is as far in advance of wireless telegraphy, as telegraphy is in advance of the semaphore. This is a science beyond your knowledge, that is all. Name another city."

"New York," said I.

The light went out, and there was New York. We were viewing it from somewhere over by Governor's Island, with the ferries

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plying to and fro and the whole enormous outline of the business section sharp against the sky. A peculiarity was that the flags were all at half-mast. I recalled that they had been that way when I passed the statue of Liberty outward bound.

"Timbuctu," I said suddenly; and nothing happened. New York vanished, but no picture took its place.

"Mombasa," I said then, and Mombasa appeared instantly, with Kilindini harbor fringed with palm-trees.

I had been to Mombasa, whereas I never had seen Timbuctu. Almost certainly none present had ever seen the place, or even a picture of it.

"Cape Town," I said; and there lay Table Bay, and Table Mountain frowning over it, with a dust-storm blowing along the road from Greenpoint, just as I had seen it last.

"Antofagasta," I said next; and once more nothing happened. None of us had ever been there.

The Gray Mahatma said something in a surly undertone and the golden light turned itself on again, flooding the whole chamber. King nodded to me.

"You can speak into a phonograph and reproduce your voice. There's no reason why you can't think and reproduce that too, if you know how," he said.

"Aye!" the Mahatma interrupted. "If you know how! India has always known how! India can teach these sciences to all the world when she comes into her freedom."

"I'll bet you it's some system of vibrations," answered King.

"All energy consists of nothing but vibrations," said the Gray Mahatma. "But can you control them? The vibration of a few tons rolling on rails can shake a city's foundations, but are you the master of that?"

"Well, why don't you turn your science loose and teach it?" answered King.

"Because, my friend," said the Gray Mahatma, "these sciences are much too dangerous to be trusted in the keeping of nations that believe in war. There would be no world left within a year. India must be set free. A beginning must be made here. Little by little, as the world learns self-control, it shall then be taught our sciences."

Throughout, the man who had admitted us had not spoken one word. He stood with arms folded, as upright as a soldier on parade. But now he unfolded his arms and began to exhibit signs of restlessness, as if he considered that the session had lasted long enough. However, he was still silent.

"Your honor is extremely clever. I've enjoyed the exhibition," I said to him in Hindustanee, but he took not the slightest notice of me, and if he understood he did not betray the fact.

"Let us go," said the Gray Mahatma, and proceeded to lead the way.

But King and I took no chances with that marvelous plane of energy that functioned in the entrance. King took my arm and we squeezed through the door together, on the theory that nobody intended to kill him, and that therefore we would be both safe. Then, as we could not very well walk down the narrow passage arm-in-arm I went in front and King laid both hands on my shoulders.

THE Gray Mahatma took the other turning of the fork, and knocked on the door at the end. It was opened by a little man, who once had been extremely fat, for his skin hung about him in loose folds. He hardly looked like an Indian; there was something Mongolian about his features, although he was not Chinese. He might have come from somewhere on the borderland between India, China and Thibet, where the races and religions mingle and Buddhism makes its last stand. He was naked to the waist—all smiles—and as silent as the other man had been.

His cavern was smaller than the other, but as clean, and similarly flooded with the restful golden light. In his own way this fellow too seemed proud, only he expressed it differently, appearing gratified to receive visitors instead of superbly bored. But he was only host; the Gray Mahatma was showman.

"You spoke of vibrations," he said, turning to King. "All energy is vibrations; yet that is only one fraction of the truth. All is vibration. The universe consists of nothing else. Your western scientists are just beginning to discover that, but they are men groping in the dark, who can feel but not see and understand. Throughout what all nations have agreed to call the dark ages there have been men called

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alchemists, whom other men have mocked because they sought to transmute baser metals into gold. Do you think they sought what was impossible? Nothing is impossible! They dimly discerned the possibility. And it may be that their ears had caught the legend of what has been known in India for countless ages.

"Gold is a system of vibrations, just as every other metal is, and the one can be changed into the other. But if you knew how to do it, would you dare? Can you conceive what would happen to the world if it were common knowledge, or even if it were known to a few, how the transmutation may be brought about? Now watch!"

What followed was convincing for the simple reason that there was nothing covered up, and no complicated apparatus that might cause you to suspect an ordinary conjuring trick. There were certainly strange looking boxes with hinged lids arranged on a ledge along one side of the chamber, but those were only brought into play when the funny little ex-fat man selected a lump of metal from them. On another ledge on the opposite side of the cell there were about a hundred rolls of very ancient-looking manuscripts, but he did not make use of them in any way.

As I have said, he was naked to the waist; below that he wore a loin-cloth that was hardly copious enough for decency, and I am willing to take oath that it concealed no mechanism and had no pockets in it.

The floor was bare, smooth rock; there was nothing on it, not even a mat. He laid a plain piece of wood on the floor and motioned us to be seated in front of it; so we squatted in a line with our backs to the door, King taking his place between the Mahatma and me. There was no hocus-pocus or flummery; the whole proceeding was as simple as playing dominoes.

Our host went to one of the peculiar looking boxes and selected a lump of what looked like lead. It was a small piece, about the size of an ordinary loaf of sugar and had no particular marks on it, except that it looked as if it might have been cut from a larger piece with shears or some such instrument. He set it down on the middle of the slab of wood, and squatted in front of it, facing us, to watch. I wanted to examine the piece of wood, and so did King, but the Gray Mahatma warned King not to touch it. He did not seem to mind whether I touched it or not, so, knowing his sentiments regarding me, I refrained, especially as our host was also careful not even to touch the piece of lead as it came in contact with the slab, but opened his fingers and dropped it the last inch, moving his hand away swiftly.

I daresay it took twenty minutes for that lump of lead to change into what looked like gold before our eyes. Remember this: We had no proof that it was either lead or gold. It looked like lead to begin with, and exactly like gold when the operation was over. It began by sizzling, and melting in little pits and spots, but never once did the whole lump melt, and whatever heat there was was so entirely local that neither could we feel it from where we sat nor was there any trace of burning on the wooden slab.

The tiny portions that melted and liquefied became full of motion, although the motion was never in one place for more than about a minute at a time; and wherever the motion had been the lump lost bulk, so that gradually the whole piece shrank and shrank as it changed its specific gravity. Several times while the process was going on I drove my nails deep into my thigh, and bit my lip, to make sure that my senses were in working order. I also looked at King, and he looked at me and nodded; we were both awake and in full possession of our faculties.

Besides, there was not the slightest pretense of the experiment being outside the realm of natural science. I have seen more mystery indulged in over the selling of a horse or the weighing of a pound of sugar. Our host seemed as interested as we were, but only interested, not superstitious or suggesting the supernatural. He was like a man who has wound up a machine and sits to watch it run.

The stuff began to change color at about half-time, when it had lost considerable of its original bulk. Then it took on all the hues of the spectrum and glowed, the colors shifting and changing with a sort of rhythm repeated again and again. It assumed the gold hue last of all, and it was not until it had done shrinking to less than half its original size that the prism colors left the last corner of it and the whole piece shone yellow; and by that time it was not in its original shape, but had taken the form of a miniature cow's dropping.

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I suppose it was hot. Our host waited several minutes before picking it off the slab; perhaps he was waiting for the unseen energy that he had brought in play to discontinue its activity and cease to be dangerous, but first and last there was no evidence that I could detect of how he controlled the force that he was using.

At last he took the nugget off the slab and tossed it to King. King handed it to me. It was still warm and it looked and felt like gold. I laid it back on the slab.

"Do you understand it?" asked the Gray Mahatma.

CHAPTER VIII

"This will be the strangest sight of all!"

OUR little wrinkly-skinned host did the honors as far as the door, and I thanked him for the demonstration; but the Gray Mahatma seemed displeased with that and, ignoring me as usual, turned on King in the doorway almost savagely.

"Do you understand that whoever can do what you have just seen can also accomplish the reverse of it, and transmute gold into baser metal?" he demanded. "Does it occur to you what that would mean? A new species of warfare! One combination of ambitious fools making gold—another unmaking it. Chaos! Now you shall see another science that is no fit pabulum for fools."

So King laid his hands on my shoulders again, and we did a lock-step down the passage until we came to a door on our right. It was opened instantly by a lean, mean-looking ascetic, whose hooked nose suggested an infernal brand of contempt for whoever might not agree with him. Just as the others had done, he met the Gray Mahatma's eyes in silence, and admitted us by simply turning his back. But this door only opened into another passage, and we had to follow him for fifty feet and then through another door into a cavern that was bigger than any. And this time our host was not alone. We were expected by a dozen lean, bronze men, who squatted in a row on one mat with expressionless faces. They were not wearing masks, but they looked as if they might have been.

This last cavern was certainly a blow-hole. Its round roof, blackened with smoke, was like the underside of a cathedral dome. No effort seemed to have been made to trim the walls, and the floor, too, had been left as nature made it, shaped something like a hollow dish by the pressure of expanding gases millions of years ago when the rock was molten.

The very center of the vast floor was the lowest point of all, and some work had been done there, for it was shaped into a rectangular trough thirty feet long by ten wide. That trough—there was no guessing how deep it might be—was filled almost to the brim with white-hot charcoal, so that obviously there was a means of forcing a draft into it from underneath.

The cavern was so enormous that the heat from the trough-shaped furnace did not make the temperature unbearable. King and I sweated freely, but the air was fresh and you could breathe it comfortably. Moreover, the heat seemed to make no impression whatever either on the Gray Mahatma or the thirteen men who were the cavern's occupants.

"Now," said the Mahatma, turning to King as usual and ignoring me, "your friend may submit to the test if he wishes. He may walk on that furnace. He shall walk unscathed. I promise it. If he is fit to serve the purpose he will do that. If not, no. Skill is not required of him. The knowledge how to render that fire harmless is ours, not his. Let us see whether he has courage."

King turned to me.

"What d'you say?" he asked. "I've seen this done before.* It can be done. Shall we try it together?"

I did not hesitate. There are times when even such a slow thinker as I am can make up his mind in a flash. I said "No" with such emphasis that King laughed. The Mahatma looked at me rather pityingly, but made no comment. He invited the two of us to sit down, so we squatted on the floor as close to the trough as we could go without being scorched. The whole cavern was flooded with the same golden light that had shone in the other places, and there were no corners into which we could not see. There were no screens or obstructions of any kind, and the only appliance in evidence was an iron paddle, which the man who had admitted us picked up off the floor.

Now this is the most extraordinary

* See the newspaper accounts of fire-walking in the presence of the Prince of Wales and about a thousand witnesses, mostly European.

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circumstance of all that followed—that man was clothed. It is true, he did not wear much, but his loin-cloth was fairly voluminous and hung down below his knees, more or less like a kilt. I also noticed that his legs were hairy. His feet were absolutely bare.

HE TOOK that paddle, and without any preliminary fuss or hesitation walked straight on to the bed of white-hot charcoal, beginning at one end, and smoothed the whole glowing surface with the paddle, taking his time about it and working with as little excitement as a gardener using a rake. When he had finished the end of the paddle was better than red-hot—a good cherry-red. And I know there was no fake about that, because he came and sat down close to us, laying the paddle on the floor near me. I wetted my finger and touched the thing. It sizzled.

The hairs on his legs were unscorched. The cotton cloth of which his kilt was made showed not the slightest trace of burning.

As soon as he had sat down the other twelve advanced toward the fire. Unlike him, they were stark naked. One by one they walked into the fire and traversed it from end to end with no more sign of nervousness than if they had been utterly unconscious of its existence. Then they turned around and walked back again. They did not even seem proud of their ability, and they certainly did not behave like men who were going through any kind of rite, or peforming a trick.

"Is it the men or the fire?" King demanded.

"Neither," the Mahatma answered. "It is simply knowledge. They understand a science that has been known in India for ages. It is an ordinary charcoal fire. Any one can do it, who knows how. But would you dare give that knowledge to the world as yet? Would armies not make use of it? Would they not equip their conscripts and then send them forth to conquer? Yet during more centuries than men can count this knowledge has been known to a few of us who will never teach what we know until the world can be trusted. Little by little must the beginning be.

"Consider: Feats like this have often been performed in public, yet what happened? How many spectators recognized a science? None! Some thought it was deception. Others were superstitious. There is already too much superstition in the world; shall we then add to it? If we should tell what we know to the world as it is at present, we should be like Galileo stating astronomical facts to the men of his day. All the entrenched powers would denounce us. All the criminals would seek to make use of the science. And finally they would turn our knowledge back on us and seek to destroy us altogether. No. First India must be set free. Then we will teach India little by little. Then India will teach the world. For the *Kali-Yug* is over."

Before he had finished speaking one of the men approached the fire again. He sat down on it, and went through the motions of bathing himself in the white-hot flame, turning his head repeatedly to grin at us. Then, lying down full-length, he rolled from end to end of the furnace, and walked away at last as casually as if he had come out of a bath. It was perfectly astonishing stuff to watch.

"If this isn't superstition, or mesmerism, or deception of some kind, why do you insist on all this mummery of soot and ashes for my friend and me?" King demanded. "Why do you use a temple full of Hindu idols to conceal your science, if it is a natural science and not trickery?"

The Gray Mahatma smiled tolerantly.

"Can you suggest a better way of keeping the secret?" he answered. "We are protected by the superstition. Not even the Government of India would dare arouse the superstitious wrath of the people by inquiring too closely into what goes on beneath a temple. If we were to admit that what we know is science, just as wireless telegraphy is science, we would not be safe for an hour; the military, the kings of commerce, the merely curious, and all the enemies of mankind would invent ten thousand excuses for investigating us. If we should teach them, they would produce chaos. If we should discontinue the practise, it would be lost to the world perhaps forever. Therefore this mummery to hide our knowledge. The fakirs and charlatans who pretend to knowledge have become a screen for us to live behind."

"Where did you learn English?" King demanded.

"I am a Ph.D. of Johns Hopkins," the

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Gray Mahatma answered. "I have traveled all over the United States seeking for one man who might be trusted with the rudiments of our science. But I found none."

"Suppose you had found the wrong man —and trusted him?" King suggested.

The Gray Mahatma smiled.

"The penalty for all mistakes is death," he answered. "It is all one to the cobra whether you tread on him by accident or not. It is all one to the world whether you turn danger loose by mistake or by intention. It is all one to us whether one of us commits a crime or a mistake. The penalty is death in every instance."

"Do you pretend then that if I were to go to the United States, accepting your offer, and were to make what you might consider a mistake, somebody in your employ would be able to make an end of me?" King asked him.

"My friend," said the Gray Mahatma, "you are better known to us than we to you. You are a man incapable of treachery. You love India, and all your life you have striven to act always and in all things like a man. You have been watched for years. Your character has been studied. If our purpose had been to conquer the world, or to destroy the world, we would never have selected you. There is no need to speak to you of what would happen if you should commit treachery. There is no risk of your explaining the secret of our science to the wrong individual, for you are not going to be taught it.

"And as for any other mistake that you might make, the United States Government would put you either into jail or into a lunatic asylum, because it is the habit of all humans to do that to those who hold convictions contrary to their own. When you go to the United States you will be like Galileo trying to make the Pope believe that the earth moves around the sun."

"Well, what of my friend Ramsden?" King asked him.

"Your friend Mr. Ramsden I think will never again see the United States."

"Why?"

"He has seen too much for his own good. He lacks your mentality. He has bravery of a kind, and honesty of a kind; but he is—not—the right—man—for—our—purpose. He made a mistake when he came with you."

King looked straight into the eyes of the Gray Mahatma.

"You think you know me?" he asked.

"I know you better than you know yourself!"

"That's possible," said King. "Do you suppose I would tell you the truth?"

"I know it. I am sure of it. You have too much integrity to deal in lies."

"Very well," King answered quietly, "it's both of us or neither. Either we both go free, or you do your worst to us both. This man is my friend."

The Mahatma did not appear as much as to consider me. King interested him. I was of no further importance to him whatever.

"My friend, reflect!" he warned.

"I have reflected. You have had my last word. My friend's enemy is mine."

"I am no man's enemy."

"Prove it!"

The Gray Mahatma smiled, and thought, and smiled, and looked at King, and then away again.

"It would be a pity to destroy yourself," he said at last. "Nevertheless, you are the only chance your friend has. I have no enmity against him; he is merely unsuitable; he will be the victim of his own shortcomings, unless you can rescue him. But if you make the attempt and fail, I am afraid, my friend, that that will be the end of both of you."

It was rather like listening to your own autopsy! I confess that I began again to feel horribly afraid, although not so much so that I cared to force King into danger on my account, and once more I made my mind up swiftly. I reached out to seize the Gray Mahatma by the throat. But King struck my hand up.

"We're two to their many," he said sternly. "Keep your hair on!"

The Mahatma smiled and nodded.

"A second time you have done well," he exclaimed. "If you can keep the buffalo from blundering—but we waste time. Come."

King put his hands on my shoulders, and we lock-stepped out of the cavern behind the Mahatma, looking I don't doubt supremely ridiculous, and I for one feeling furiously impotent. To me it looked like much the simplest course to seize that naked, ash-smeared Ph.D. in front and throttle him until he promised safety for

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us both. Strangely enough, I felt sure he was a man of his word and would keep a promise given even under duress. I whispered something of the kind to King as we lock-stepped down the passage.

"You'll get nowhere with violence," he answered. "Leave him to me."

WE ENTERED another cave, whose dome looked like an absolutely perfect hemisphere, but the whole place was so full of noise that your brain reeled in confusion. There were ten men in there, naked to the waist as all the rest had been, and every single one of them had the intelligent look of an alert bird with its head to one side. They were sitting on mats on the floor in no apparent order, and each man had a row of tuning forks in front of him, pretty much like any other tuning forks, except that there were eight of them to each note and its subdivisions.

Every few moments one of them would select a fork, strike it, and listen; then he would get up, dragging his mat after him with all the forks arranged on it, and sit down somewhere else. But the tuning forks were not the cause of the din. It was the roar of a great city that was echoing under the dome—clatter of traffic and men's voices, whistling of the wind through overhead wires, dogs' barking, an occasional bell, at intervals the whistle of a locomotive and the rumble and bump of a railroad train, whirring of dynamos, the clash and thump of trolley cars, street-hawkers' cries, and the sound of sea-waves breaking on the shore.

"You hear Bombay," said the Mahatma, and sat down with his back against the wall. We were just going to follow suit, when one of the ten with the tuning forks looked up and frowned irritably. Promptly the Mahatma moved himself away from the wall, and the fellow with the tuning fork nodded. Then we all sat down in line.

It was actual physical torture until you were used to it, and I doubt whether you could get used to it without somebody to educate you—some scientist to show you how to defend your nerves against that outrageous racket. For the sounds were all out of adjustment and proportion. Nothing was in key. It was as if the laws of acoustics had been lifted, and sound had gone crazy.

At one moment, apropos of nothing and disconnected from all other sounds, you could hear a man or a woman speaking as distinctly as if the individual were up there under the dome; then a chaos of off-key notes would swallow the voice and the next might be a dog's bark or a locomotive whistle. The only continuously recognizable sounds were a power station and the thunder of waves along the harbor front, and it sounded much more thunderous than it should have done at that season of the year.

It was a futurist painting in sound. There was everything in it, and no order whatever. It might have been the workshop of the world, with all the forces that go to the making of a world being tuned and tested. The tuning of an orchestra does not nearly approximate the confusion; for the members of the orchestra are all trying to find one pitch and are gradually hitting it, whereas every sound within that cavern seemed to be pitched and keyed differently.

"This is our latest," said the Mahatma. "It is only for two or three hundred years that we have been studying this phenomenon. It may possibly take us two or three hundred years more before we can control it. Almost exactly three hundred years ago the first distant sounds were localized under this dome. Do you notice that they are entirely localized? If that door were left open, not a sound could be heard in the passage. Of those ten men whom you see there, five are initiates and five are pupils. In their turn the five pupils will each take a pupil, and so whatever has been learned by one generation is handed along to the next, and no knowledge is lost. Only ignorance is forgotten."

I wanted to ask questions, but could not because the cursed inharmony made my senses reel. Nevertheless, you could hear other sounds perfectly. When I struck my hand on the rock floor I could hear the slap at least as distinctly as normal; possibly a little more so. And when the Gray Mahatma spoke, each word was separate and sharp.

"Now you shall hear another city," he said. "Observe that the voices of cities are as various as men's. No two are alike. Sound and color are one and the same thing differently expressed, and the gradations of both are infinite."

He caught the eye of the man who had

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frowned when he set his back against the wall.

"Calcutta!" he said, in a voice not exactly of command, yet certainly not of deference.

Without acknowledging the order in any other way, the man got on to his knees and picked up an enormous tuning fork, whose prongs were about three feet long, and he made some adjustment in the fork of it that took about five minutes. He might have been turning the screw of a micrometer; I could not see. Then, raising the fork above his shoulder, he struck the floor with it, and a master-note as clear as the peal of a bell went ringing up into the dome.

The effect was almost ridiculous. It made you want to laugh. Everybody in the cavern smiled, and I daresay if the truth were known we had discovered the mother-lode of comedy. That one note chased all the others out of the dome as a dog might chase sheep—as the wind blows clouds away—as a cop drives small boys off the grass. They actually scampered out of hearing, and you couldn't imagine them hiding close by, either; they were gone for good, and that one, clear master-note—the middle F—went vibrating around and around, as if scouring out the very smell of what had been there.

"That is the key-note of all nature," said the Mahatma. "All sounds, all colors, all thoughts, all vibrations center on that note. It is the key that can unlock them all."

The silence that followed when the last ringing overtone had gone off galloping in its stride toward infinity was the most absolute and awful silence I have ever had to listen to. The very possibility of sound seemed to have ceased to exist. You could not believe that there could be sound, nor remember what sound was like. A whole sense and its functions had been taken from you, and the resultant void was dead—so dead that no sense could live in it, unless fear is a sense. You could feel horribly afraid, and I'll tell you what the fear amounted to:

There was a feeling that these men were fooling with the force that runs the universe, and that the next stroke might be a mistake that would result like the touching of two high-tension wires, multiplied to the *nth*. You could not resist the suggestion that the world might burst in fragments at any minute.

Meanwhile the fellow with the tuning-fork fiddled again with some adjustment on the thick portion of its stem, and presently whirling it around his head as the old-time warriors used two-handed swords, he brought it down on one of a circle of small anvils that were arranged around him like the figures on a clock-face.

You could almost see Calcutta instantly! The miracle was the reverse of the preceding one. The ringing, subdivided, sharp, discordant note he struck was swallowed instantly in a sea of noise that seemed not only to have color but even smell to it; you could smell Calcutta! But that, of course, was mere suggestion—a trick of the senses of the sort that makes your mouth water when you see another fellow suck a lemon.

You could even hear the crows that sit on the trees in the park and caw obscenity at passers-by. You could hear the organ in a Christian church, and the snarl of a pious Moslem reading from the Koran. There was the click of ponies' hoofs, the whirring and honk of motor-cars, the sucking of Hoogli River, booming of a steamer-whistle, roar of trains, and the peculiar clamor of Calcutta's swarms that I can never hear without thinking of a cobra with its hood just ready to raise.

The fellow with the enormous tuning-fork caught the eye of one of his assistants—nobody seemed to have any use for words in that system of caverns—and the man very carefully selected a small fork from the row in front of him. He examined it, made a slight adjustment, and then struck it against another fork. The combination seemed to make no sound at all, but to bring out a third one.

In the sea of noises in the dome one instantly stood out—the voice of a man speaking English with a slightly babu accent. For exactly as long as the reverberations of those two tuning forks lasted, you could hear him declaiming, and then his voice faded away again into the ocean of noise like a rock that has shown for a moment above the surface of a maelstrom.

"That is a member of the legislature, where ignorant men in all-night session make laws for fools to break," said the Gray Mahatma. "We have not yet learned how to select one voice or any one series of sounds and release that exclusively; but you see, we have made progress. Light, sound, and color are all one—just combinations of vibration. Diligence! And the universe is an open book!"

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He was looking at me curiously, as if he thought my mind might be an open book to him, and I know he noticed that some of the off-pitch noises in the roof were causing me actual torture, whereas they seemed to make no impression on King whatever. Signing to King and me to remain seated he himself crossed the floor to where the master-tuner sat, and squatting down beside him began picking up tuning forks and striking one against the other. Each time he did that some city sound or other distinguished itself for a moment, exactly as the theme appears in music; only some of the vibrations seemed to jarr against others instead of blending with them, and when that happened the effect was intensely disagreeable.

At last he struck a combination that made me jump as effectually as sudden tooth-ache. Some of the other sounds had affected King more, but that particular one passed him by and tortured me. Watching with his head a little to one side the Gray Mahatma instantly began striking those two forks as rapidly as if he were clapping hands, increasing the vehemence with each stroke.

If I had stayed there I would have been stark mad or dead within five minutes. I felt as if I were being vibrated asunder—as if my whole body were resolving into its component parts. I lay on the floor with my head in both hands, and I daresay yelled with agony, but I don't know about that.

At any rate King understood and acted instantly. He seized me under the arms and dragged me face-downward to the door, where he had to drop me in order to find how to open the thing. Having accomplished that, he dragged me through into the passage, where the agony ceased as instantly as the ache does when a dentist pulls an abscessed tooth. No one sound reached us through the open door. However immature that particular branch of their science might be, they had learned the way of absolutely localizing noise.

The Gray Mahatma came out smiling, and ignoring me as if I was not there—very nearly stumbling over my legs, in fact, for I was still sitting and he seemed to have shoved me out of his very consciousness—patted King on the shoulder.

"Very good!" he said. "Excellent! If you can save that buffalo alive, you may have him! Even so I once saved a friend, and he did well enough afterward. But if you succeed, you must remember that you are responsible for him. A mistake by him will mean disaster for you. There is no escaping that responsibility. Come."

HE OPENED another door, not requiring to knock this time, and led the way along another passage that wound through solid rock for what can hardly have been less than a quarter of a mile. In places the walls were natural, but here and there were perfectly straight borings where two natural passages had been joined together, and most of the way we seemed to be following an ancient water-course that had been helped out with adze and chisel. The whole long passage was flooded with that same peculiarly restful golden light, without any apparent means of producing it, nor any one spot brighter than another to show whence the illumination came.

Though the pains had gone out of my head I was dizzy and numb, and felt nearly as weak as after a month of malaria. It was all I could do to walk by holding on to either wall, and the support of King's hands on my shoulders from behind was something more than mere precaution against attack.

Nevertheless, King had dragged me out of that dome of dins in the nick of time, and my head was recovering rapidly. By the time we reached a door at the end of that long passage I could think clearly, and although too weak to stand upright without holding on to something, was sufficiently recovered to know that the remainder would be only a matter of minutes. And we spent three or four of the minutes waiting for the door to open, which it did at last suddenly.

A man appeared in the opening, whose absolutely white hair reached below his shoulder-blades, and whose equally white beard descended to his middle. He wore the usual loin-cloth, but was usual in nothing else. He looked older than Methuselah, yet strong, for his muscles stood out like knotted whip-cords; and active, for he stood on the balls of his feet with the immobility that only comes of ableness. The most unusual thing of all was that he spoke. He said several words in Sanskrit to the Gray Mahatma, before turning his back on us and leading the way in.

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"This will be the strangest sight of all," said the Mahatma, motioning to King to follow.

CHAPTER IX

"Who shall disobey her?"

WE WENT into a cavern whose floor was cup-shaped. Nearly all the way around the rim of the cup was an irregular ledge averaging twenty feet in width; with that exception, the whole interior was shaped like an enormous egg with its narrow end upward. The bottom was nowhere less than a hundred feet across, and was reached by steps cut irregularly downward from the rim.

At intervals around the ledge were seated about a score of men, some solitary, some in groups of three; some were naked, others wore loin-cloths; all were silent, but they all took an obvious interest in us, and some of them were grinning. A few of them squatted, with their legs tucked under them, but most of them let their legs hang over the edge, and they all had an air of perfect familiarity with the surroundings as well as what can be best described as a "team look." You see the same air of careless competence around a well-managed circus lot.

King and I followed the Gray Mahatma down into the bowl, and under his directions seated ourselves exactly in the middle, King and I back to back and the Mahatma a little way away from us and also with his back turned. In that position my back was toward the door we had entered by, but I was able to see nine narrow openings in the opposite wall about twenty feet higher than the ledge, and those openings may have had something to do with what followed, although I can't prove it.

Old gray-beard, who had admitted us, stood on the ledge like a picture of St. Simon Stylites, folding his arms under his flowing beard and looking almost ready to plunge downward, as if the bowl were a swimming tank. The way he had of standing on the balls of his feet heightened the impression, and I thought at first that we were going to see one of those levitation stunts that any one who has never been to India can tell you all about but that have been actually witnessed by very few who can be persuaded to tell what they have seen.

However, he suddenly filled his great scrawny breast with air and boomed out one word. The golden light ceased to exist. There was no period of going, as there is even with electric light. He spoke, and it was not. Nothing whatever was visible. I held a finger up, and poked my eye before I knew it.

The silence was as dense as the darkness. The only sound I could hear was our breathing and my own heart-beats; but we breathed as little as possible, for the suggestion of expectancy was paralyzing.

Then all at once there began the most delicious music, like Ariel singing in mid-air. It was subdued, but as clear as the ripple of a mountain stream over pebbles, and there was absolutely no locating it, for it seemed to come from everywhere at once, even from underneath us. And simultaneously with the music there began to be a dim light, which was all the more impossible to locate because it was never the same color in two places, nor even in one place for longer than a note of music lasted.

"Observe!" boomed the Gray Mahatma's solemn voice. "Color and sound are one. Both are vibration. You shall behold the color harmonies."

Presently the connection between sound and color began to be obvious. Each note had its color, and as that note was sounded the color appeared in a thousand places. But the marvel was that the overtones had corresponding shades of color, which went outward in rings exactly as water does when you throw a stone into it, so that the whole cavern became full of circling whorls of colored light that wove themselves into infinitely blended patterns.

It was eastern music. It filled the cavern, and as the pulse of it quickened the light danced, colors shooting this and that way like shuttles weaving a new sky. But there were no drum-beats yet, and the general effect was rather of dreaminess. A fellow who afterward died of opium smoking once tried to describe to me what he saw when the fumes were in his head, and I judge that that combination of sound and color must have come rather close to it.

When the old gray-beard's voice boomed out at last from the ledge above us, and light and music ceased simultaneously, the effect was nauseating. It went to the pit of your stomach. The instantaneous darkness produced vertigo. You felt as if you were falling down an endless pit, and King and I

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clutched each other. The mere fact that we were squatting on a hard floor did not help matters, for the floor seemed to be falling too and to be turning around bewilderingly, just as the whorls of colored light had done. Nevertheless, there was no afterglow on the retina, as there is when you have been staring at ordinary incandescents. Your eyes bulged from their sockets and yearned. I would probably have vomited if the gray-beard's voice had not boomed again; whereat there was more music, and light in tune to it.

THIS time, of all unexpected things, Beethoven's Overture to Leonore began to take visible form in the womb of night, and I would rather be able to set down what we saw than write Homer's Iliad! It must be that we knew then all that Beethoven did. It was not just wind music, or mere strings, but a whole, full-volumed orchestra—where, or whence there was no guessing; the music came at you from everywhere at once, and with it light, interpreting the music.

To me that has always been the most wonderful overture in the world anyhow, for it seems to describe creation when the worlds took form in the void; but with that light, each tone and semi-tone and chord and harmony expressed and interpreted in the absolutely pure color that belonged to it, it was utterly beyond the scope of words. It was a new unearthly language, more like a glimpse of the next world than anything in this.

You know, for instance, how such a simple thing as martial music can quicken your pulse. Well, multiply that to the farthest limit of imagination and then add color to it. You know how the face of the world can change when the dawn light rises along a mountain range. That is how music changes when each demi-semi-quaver has its own physical color added, and all the overtones go rioting through the prism until they vanish in an opalescence like that of spiders' webs in the early dew.

Every once in a while I could see the Gray Mahatma, no longer looking gray but glorious with all the hues of the rainbow. Nevertheless, there was something not so glorious about his smile, and he was watching me with an interest that set me thinking.

The combination of color and music was having a highly desirable effect on me. Nothing could have done more to counteract the effects of the godless din that bowled me over in the other cavern.

But King was having a rotten time. He can keep his head on the edge of a four thousand foot precipice with a sixty-knot storm blowing. He is proof against that oriental stuff that seeps into the European and undermines sanity. But he was heaving now as he tried to master himself. I heard him exclaiming—

"Oh my God!" as if the physical torture were unbearable.

The Gray Mahatma was not troubling about King. He had shifted his position so as to watch me, and he seemed to expect me to collapse. So I showed as little as possible of my real feelings, and shut my eyes at intervals as if bewildered—not that mere eyelids could keep out that color. We were bathed in it, steeped in it. You could see nearly as clearly with eyes shut as with them open, and perhaps because of that I failed to convince him. At any rate he cried out just as the gray-beard on the ledge had done.

The overture to Leonore ceased. The colors gave place to the restful golden light. King had not collapsed yet, and his usual Spartan self-mastery prevented him then from betraying much in the way of symptoms. So I clutched my head and tried to look all-in, which gave me a chance to whisper to King under my arm.

"Can you hang on?"

"Dunno. How are you doing?"

"Fine."

"Then when the next attack comes I'll bend in front of it. I'm nearly all in."

The Gray Mahatma seemed to think that I was appealing to King for help. He looked delighted. Between my fingers I could see him signaling to the gray-beard on the ledge. The golden light vanished again. And now once more they gave us eastern music, awful stuff, pulsating with a distant drumbeat like the tramp of an army of devils. The colors were angry and glowering now. The shapes they took as they plaited and wove themsleves into one another were all involuted, everything turning itself inside out, and the end of every separate movement was blood-red streaked with the hue of entrails.

King groaned aloud and rolled over on his side, just as the stuff became so dim and dreadful that you could hardly see your

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hand before your face, and a noise like the rushing of the wind between the worlds made every inch of your skin prickly with goose-flesh. Low though the colors were, when you shut your eyes you could still see them, but I could not see the Gray Mahatma, and I was sure he could not see me. He would not know which of us was down and out.

So I seized King and dragged him across the floor to the point where the irregular stone steps provided the only way of escape. There I hove him like a sack on to my shoulders. In that drunken, throbbing twilight it would have been easy for some of the gray-beard's crew to lean from the ledge and send me reeling back again; the best chance was to climb quickly before they were aware of me. Some of the steps were so far out of alinement that I had to grope for them, and on every step gained I had to pause and wait for a quivering note of brighter light to come eddying my way in order to be able to see the next.

WHEN I reached the ledge it was deserted. There was nothing whatever to indicate the gray-beard and his crew were. I could not remember exactly the direction of the entrance, but made for the wall, intending to feel my way along it; and just as I started to do that I heard the Gray Mahatma climbing up behind me.

He made hardly more noise than a cat, but the smallest sounds had a trick of finding their way sporadically through that mess of light and music. Sometimes they were utterly lost in it. A moment later a pin-fall would announce itself. Sometimes you could tell the exact direction of a sound; at others the noise of my own breathing apparently came from behind me and the drumming of my heart-beats was somewhere away off.

But though the Mahatma was stealthy, he came swiftly, and in a moment I felt his hand touch me. That was exactly at the moment when the music and colors were subdued to a sort of hell-brew twilight—the kind of glow you might expect before the whelming of the world. There was a far-away throb in it that suggested violence and wrath, and it gave you the feeling that Lot may have had when he hurried away from Gomorrah. The good thing was that the Mahatma could see no more than I could.

"You are as strong as the buffalo himself," he said, mistaking me for King. "Leave that fool here, and come with me."

My right hand was free, but the Gray Mahatma had plenty of assistance at his beck and call.

So I put my hand in the small of his back and shoved him along in front of me. If he should learn too soon that King, and not I, was down and out he might decide to have done with us both there and then. My task was to get out of that cavern before the golden light came on again.

The Gray Mahatma led the way to the door, and it was just as well that he did, for there was some secret way of opening it that I should almost certainly have failed to find. I pushed him through ahead of me, and no more dared look back than Lot did, although the music burst into a clamor like warring elements, and the light blazed into a corresponding furnace of raw color at the moment when I slammed the door behind us.

And then we were in pitch darkness. The Mahatma either did not know how to control that golden light or else had not the means of doing it just then. There was neither light, nor room to turn, and nothing for it but for the Mahatma to lead the way along, and I had to be careful in carrying King not to injure him against the rock in the places where the passage narrowed. The only way of discovering those places was by crashing into them.

Nevertheless, the Mahatma could not go fast enough for me. I was in mortal dread lest that door behind us should open again and some one should let loose a flood of light to show him his mistake.

King felt like a dead man on my shoulder. I could not feel his heart beat. The combination of color and music had found, as it were, the undipped heel of Achilles, putting *hors de combat* a man who has endured in his time a thousand times more hardships than would kill me out of hand.

However, he began to recover gradually as we neared the end of the long passage, regaining consciousness by fits and starts like a man coming out of anesthesia, and commencing to kick so that I had hard work to preserve him from injury. When his feet were not striking out against the walls his head was, and I finally shook him violently. That had the desired effect. It was just as if fumes had gone out of his head. His

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body grew warmer almost in a moment, and I felt him break out into sweat. Then he groaned, and asked me where we were; and a moment later he seemed to understand what was happening, for he struggled to free himself.

"All right," he whispered. "Let me walk."

So I let him slip down to his feet in front of me, and holding him beneath the armpits repeated our lock-step trick with positions reversed; and when we reached the outer door that gave on to the narrow main passage he was going fairly strong. The Mahatma opened the door and stepped out into the light; but it was the strange peculiarity of that light that it did not flow beyond its appointed boundaries, and we continued to be in darkness as long as we did not follow him through the door.

So when King stepped out ahead of me, the Mahatma had no means of knowing what a mistake he had been making all along. He naturally jumped to the conclusion that King had been carrying me, and supposed that King's obvious weakness was due to his efforts—a plausible mistake enough, for I weigh an eighth of a ton and no man could carry me a quarter of a mile without getting weak at the knees.

"You work hard for small profit," he said, smiling, though fairly tolerantly. "That buffalo was hardly worth your pains, but you shall have him since you love him so. He will be grateful, and gratitude is a good quality to work with."

When I stepped out of the pitch blackness he looked more than a little surprized at my appearance, and I grinned back at him as sheepishly as I could manage, hoping he would not see the red patch on my shoulder caused by the pressure of King's weight, or the scratches made by King's fingernails when he was beginning to recover consciousness. Nevertheless, he did see, and understood.

"Lead on, MacDuff!" I said in plain English, and perhaps he did not dislike me so immensely after all, for he smiled as he turned his back to lead the way.

WE PASSED, without meeting anybody, out through the narrow door where the first tall speechless showman had admitted us, into the cave where the lingam reposed on its stone altar; and there the Mahatma resumed the lantern he had left. He shook it to see how much oil remained, and there was precious little, so we must have been longer in those caverns than it seemed. In fact, looking backward, the whole experience was so like a dream that it was hard to believe we had been gone five minutes.

When we climbed the oval stairway and emerged on the platform under the cupola the dawn was just about to break. The Gray Mahatma raised the stone lid with an ease that betrayed unsuspected strength and dropped it into place, where it fitted so exactly that no one ignorant of the secret would ever have guessed the existence of a hidden stairway. The stone platform with its cupola looked then like what it probably exactly was—a pulpit from which a priest could address a crowd of superstitious Hindus.

Swinging his lantern the Mahatma led into the temple, where the enormous idols loomed in quivering shadow, and made straight for the biggest one of all—the four-headed one that faced the marble screen. I thought he was going to bow down and worship it. If he had done that it would have given the lie to all his protestations about freedom from superstition and there would have been no knowing what to think of his showmanship. He actually did go down on hands and knees, and I turned to King in amazement, thus missing my chance to see what he was really up to.

So I don't know how he managed it; but suddenly the whole lower part of the idol, including the thighs, swung outward and disclosed a dark passage, into which he led us, and the stone swung back into place at our backs as if balanced by weights. I know that was the secret, for in the lantern light I caught a glimpse of a heavy chain moving over our heads.

The darkness was too dense now for the lantern rays to show us very much, but we were in some sort of building without windows, and it seemed to be at least as large as the temple itself. There was no sound in there but our own footfall.

At the far end the Mahatma led into a square-mouthed tunnel, darker if that were possible than the vaulted gloom we had left, and as we entered in single file I thought I heard the splashing of water underneath.

About a minute after that the Mahatma stopped and let King draw abreast; then,

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continuing to swing his lantern he started forward again. I don't know whether it was fear, intuition or just curiosity that made me wonder why he should change the formation in that way, but quite absurdly I deduced that he wished King to walk into a trap. It was that that saved me.

"Look out, King!" I warned.

Exactly as I spoke I set my foot on a yielding stone trap-door—felt a blast of cool air—and heard water unmistakably. The air brought a stagnant smell with it. I slid forward and downward, but sprang simultaneously, managing to get my fingers on the edge of the stone in front. But the balanced trap-door, resuming its equilibrium, caught me on the back of the head, half-stunning me, and in another second I would have gone down into the dark among the alligators. I just had enough consciousness left to realize that I was hanging over the covered end of the alligator tank.

But the faint outer circle of light cast by the Mahatma's lantern just reached me, and as King turned his head to acknowledge my warning he saw me fall. He sprang back, and seized my wrists, just as my fingers began slipping on the smooth stone; but my weight was almost too much for him, and I came so near to dragging him through after me that the stone trap got past my head and jammed against my elbows.

Then I heard King yelling for the Mahatma to bring the lantern back, and after what seemed an interminable interval the Mahatma came and set one foot on the stone, so that it swung past my head again, nearly braining me in its descent. I don't know whether he intended that or not.

"There is more in this than accident," he said, his voice booming hollow as he bent to let the light fall on me. "Very well; pull up your buffalo, and you shall have him!"

But that was easier said than done. The blow from the trap had come near knocking me unconscious. I can manage my weight with one hand as a rule, but it was precious little help that I could give on that occasion, and King was no stronger for his own experiences.

"—— you, lend a hand!" he growled.

"I lend a foot. Is that not enough?" retorted the Mahatma.

"Curse him!" I gasped. "Throw him down here! Let go my wrists, King. —— him! He knows how to manage alligators. I'll go down into the water with him if I must. Look sharp!"

"Very well.

King began to let go of my wrists very carefully, and the threat made up the Gray Mahatma's mind for him.

But even so, it was no easy task for the two of them to haul me up, because the moment the Mahatma removed his foot from the lid of the trap the thing swung upward and acted like the tongue of a buckle to keep me from coming through. When he set his foot on it again, the other foot did not give him sufficient purchase. Finally King managed to pull his loin-cloth off and pass it around under my armpits, after which the two together hauled me clear, minus in the aggregate about a half square foot of skin that I left on the edge of the stone.

"Have you any more traps in store for us?" King asked then. "If so, we may as well settle our argument now. What I mean exactly is, do you want to live and see daylight?"

"Peace!" the Gray Mahatma answered. "Hot words heal no injuries. You two have passed through ordeals. That is the last. You have conquered. Come."

Off he went alone again, swinging his lantern, and apparently at peace with himself and the whole universe. Save for his nakedness he reminded me of one of those cathedral vergers, who show you the tomb of Thomas à Becket or some one, drone out the routine account of it, pocket their shilling and pass on. Our opinion of him apparently made no more difference to him than a fly makes to the spinning balance wheel; it was *his* opinion of *us* that mattered, and having formed that, he went on about his business. In his own way he was perfect.

Thereafter, King and I walked arm-in-arm, thinking in that way to lessen the risk of further pitfalls. But the Gray Mahatma had told the truth; there were no more. He reached at last what looked like a blind stone wall at the end of the tunnel; but there was a flagstone missing from the floor in front of it, and he disappeared down a black-dark flight of steps.

We followed him into a cellar, whose walls wept moisture, but we saw no cobras; and then up another flight of steps on the far side into a chamber that I thought I recognized. He disappeared through a door in the corner of that, and by the time we had

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groped our way after him he was sitting in the old black panther's cage with the brute's head in his lap, stroking and twisting its ears as if it were a kitten. The cage door was wide open, and the day was already growing hot and brassy in the east.

King and I hurried out of the cage, for the panther showed his fangs at us; the Mahatma followed us out and snapped the door shut. Instantly the panther sprang at us, trying to bend the bars together. Failing in that, he lay close and shoved his whole shoulder through, clawing at us. It was hardly any wonder that that secret, yet so simply discoverable door between Yasmini's palace and the temple-caverns was unknown.

"How about clothes now?" King suggested.

"The women will provide them," said the Mahatma.

"Huh!"

We two were unanimous. We were not going to walk practically naked into a palace full of women—even in the East, where nobody thinks much of nakedness. We were not of the East. We craved clothes even more emphatically than breakfast.

"You have ashes on you," said the Mahatma. "That is the true garb of humility."

"I'm not humble," said I. "I'm hungry. I'm going to have a bath and so are you, my friend. Right wheel! Forward! March!"

We swung him along between us through the great bronze gate and into the courtyard where the shrubs all stood reflected along with the marble stairway in a square pool. We plunged right in without as much as hesitating on the brink, dragging the Mahatma with us—not that he made the least objection. He laughed, and seemed to regard it as thoroughly good fun.

We splashed and fooled for a few minutes, standing neck-deep and kicking at an occasional fish as it darted by, stirring up mud with our toes until the water was so cloudy that we could see the fish no longer. Then King thought of clothes again. He stood on tiptoe and shouted.

"Ismail! O—Ismail!"

The Gray Mahatma, no longer looking gray but ivory-colored, climbed out and sat eyeing the water curiously; but we stayed, lacking his conviction of the decency of "the human form divine," especially when there might be women looking through the windows.

ISMAIL came, like a yellow-fanged wolf, bowed to the Mahatma as if nakedness and royalty were one, and stood eyeing the water even more curiously than the Mahatma did.

"Get us garments!" King ordered testily.

"I was not staring at thee, little King *sahib*," he answered. "I was marveling!"

But he went off without explaining what he had been marveling at, and we went on with our ablutions, the job of getting ashes out of your hair not being quite so easy as it might appear. I daresay it was fifteen minutes before Ismail came back carrying two complete native costumes for King and me, and a long saffron robe for the Mahatma. Then we came out of the water, and the Gray Mahatma smiled.

"I said there were no more traps, and it seems I spoke truth," he said wonderingly. "Moreover, I did not set this trap, but it was you yourselves who led me into it."

"Which trap?" we demanded with one voice.

"You have stirred the mud, my friends, to a condition in which the *mugger* who lives in that pool is not visible. But the *mugger* is there, and I don't know why he did not seize one of you!"

In the center of the pool there was a rockery, for the benefit of plant-roots and breeding fish. I walked around it to look, and there, sure enough, lay a brute about twenty feet long, snoozing with his chin on a corner of the rock. I picked up a pole to prod him and he snapped and broke it, coming close to the edge to clatter his jaws at me.

"Belly-in-the-mud is hungry!" said Ismail. "This is the day of the month when he is fed."

"What do you feed him on usually?"

"A dog—a horse—an ass—a dead calf—whatever is handy, *sahib*." Then he added darkly—

"He receives a man's corpse hardly often enough for one to answer that he eats men."

That brute that had not offered to touch us provided me with a worse sensation than all the monsters in the big tank had done. Prodding him a last time, I turned round to look for the Mahatma. He had vanished—gone as utterly and silently as a myth.

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King had not seen him go. We inquired of Ismail. He laughed.

"The wind is in his wings!" he answered.

King took the old ruffian by the throat and shook him, half-playfully.

"Where did he go?"

"There is only one place to go—here," he answered, strangling.

"To the Princess?"

"There is nowhere else! Who shall disobey her? I have orders to unloose the panther if the *sahibs* take any other way than straight into her presence!"

"And you'd do that?" King demanded.

"She has spoken!" said Ismail, and he stroked his beard as he eyed the alligator steadily, adding, "Belly-in-the-mud has not been fed."

CHAPTER X

"Absolute king and queen of everywhere."

KING and I discussed the situation for a minute and decided that our safest direction was forward.

Dressed now in Punjabi costume with gorgeous silk turbans, we walked side-by-side up the marble steps and knocked on the brass-bound, teak front door at the top. Exactly as when we arrived on the previous day, the door was immediately opened by two women—although not the same women—who giggled, and led us by the hand through rustling corridors to the curtains that concealed the passage at the end of which was Yasmini's private reception room. There, exactly as before, they pushed us through and left us. So we strode along together and knocking on the painted panel, heard Yasmini's golden voice cry, "Come!"

The Mahatma was in there ahead of us, and had evidently told Yasmini sufficient of our adventures to make her laugh. She was sprawling in the window-seat, looking as fresh as a flower, in morning light that filtered through the silken curtains, and if she had spent the night in vigil she certainly did not look the part.

She squealed with delight at sight of us—perhaps at the figure we cut in the native costumes; for if I looked anything like King we resembled a pair of popinjay tradesmen come to take an order for cosmetics.

"Come! Sit beside me in the window, both of you! My women shall bring food. Afterward you shall sleep—poor things, you look as if you need it! O, what is that, Ganeshaji? Blood on your linen? Were you hurt?"

Her swift, restless fingers drew the cloth aside and showed a few inches of where my bare skin should have been.

"It is nothing. My women shall dress it. They have oils that will cause the skin to grow again within a week. A week is nothing; you and Athelstan will be here longer than a week!"

That was interesting news and I caught King's eye, but he said nothing.

"And Athelstan? My lord Athelstan is not hurt? Come between me and Ganesha, my lord. I like you better and you understand me. Hee-hee! And you crossed the Pool of Terrors? I have crossed that too! Did you set your foot on a *mugger* by mistake? Hee! But that is an experience. Did you see the far-off cities? Lead turned into gold? And you saw the fire-walkers? Heard the unfinished voices? Saw the colored music? Good, I too saw all those things. We three are initiates now!"

"Ye are three who will die unless discretion is the very law ye live by!" said the Gray Mahatma. He seemed annoyed about something.

"Old Dust-and-ashes!" laughed Yasmini, snapping her fingers at him. "Are you, who were afraid of me yesterday, in a better situation to dictate to me today?"

"We struck a bargain," he retorted.

"I know. And it struck you stupid! Now I have two more who know the secret, and you are even less able to dominate me than before!"

The Gray Mahatma smiled.

"They know nothing of the secret," he retorted. "They have seen a few examples, that is all."

"Hah!" She laughed delightedly. "They have seen enough to make them believe what I shall tell them!"

"Woman, you woo your own destruction. None has ever set out to betray that secret and survived the first offense!" he answered.

"It was *you* who betrayed it to *me*," she said, with another golden laugh. Then, turning to King again:

"I have sought for that secret day and night! India has always known of its existence; and in every generation some have fought their way in through the outer mysteries to the knowledge within. But those who enter always become initiates,

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and keep the secret. I was puzzled how to begin, until I heard how, in England, a woman once overheard the secrets of Freemasonry, and was made a Freemason in consequence.

"Now behold this man they call the Gray Mahatma! He does as I tell him! You must know that these Knowers of Royal Knowledge, as they call themselves, are not the little birds in one nest that they would like to be; they quarrel among themselves, and there is a rival faction that knows only street-corner magic, but is more deadly bent on knowing Royal Knowledge than a wolf is determined to get lamb."

The Gray Mahatma saw fit to challenge some of that statement.

"It is true, that there are wolves who seek to break in," he said quietly, "but it is false that there are quarrels among ourselves."

"Hah!" That little laugh of hers was like the exclamation of a fellow who has got home with his rapier point.

"Quarrels or not," she answered, "there is a faction that was more than willing to use the ancient passage under my palace grounds, and to hold secret meetings in a room that I made ready for them."

"Faction!" The Gray Mahatma sneered. "Faithful seniors determined to expel unfaithful upstarts are not a faction!"

"At any rate," she chuckled, "they wished to hold a meeting unbeknown to the others, and they wished to make wonderful preparations for not being overheard. And I helped them—is that not so, Mahatma-ji? You see, they were scornful of women—then."

"Peace, woman!" the Mahatma growled. "Does a bee sting while it gathers honey? You spied on our secrets, but did we harm you for it?"

"You did not dare!" she retorted. "If I had been alone, you would have destroyed me along with those unfortunates on whose account you held the meeting. It would have been easy to throw me to the *mugger*. But you did not know how many women had overheard your secrets! You only knew that more than one had, and that at least ten women witnessed the fate of your victims. Is that not so?"

"Victims is the wrong word. Call them culprits!" said the Gray Mahatma.

"What would the Government call them?" she retorted.

The Gray Mahatma curled his lip, but made no other answer to that. Yasmini turned again to King.

"So I knew enough of their secrets to oblige them either to kill me or else teach me all. And they did not dare kill me, because they could not kill all my women too, for fear of Government. So first they took me through that ordeal that you went through last night. And ever since then I have been trying to learn; but this science of theirs is difficult, and I suspect them of increasing the difficulty for my benefit. Nevertheless, I have mastered some of it."

"You have mastered none of it!" the Gray Mahatma retorted discourteously. "The golden light is the first step. Show me some."

"They thought they were being too clever for me," she went on. "They thought they could bewilder me with incomprehensible formulas, and mesmerize me with examples until I should lose my head like all the other fools. Those who think themselves too clever always make mistakes. They listened to my suggestion that it might be wise to show Athelstan King the mysteries, and send him to America to prepare the way for what is coming. So we set a trap for Athelstan. And Athelstan brought Ganesha with him. So now I have two men who know of the secret, in addition to myself and all my women. And I have one man who has skill enough to *learn* the secret, now that he knows *of* it. Perhaps both men can learn it, and I know full well that one can."

"And then?" King suggested.

He looked whimsically interested, and met her eyes as frankly as he had met mine when I first unmasked him in Bombay.

"You shall conquer the world!" she answered.

King smiled and said nothing.

"I am uncertain yet whether or not I shall choose to be queen of the earth!" she said. "Sometimes I think it would be fun for you and me to be absolute king and queen of everywhere. Sometimes I think it will be better to make some stupid person—say Ganesha here, for instance—king, and for ourselves to be the power behind the throne. What do *you* think, Athelstan?"

"I think," he answered.

"And you observe that the Gray Mahatma likewise thinks!" said she. "He

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thinks what he can do to thwart us! But what strange old fogies they have been, who have owned that knowledge all these centuries! No wonder they would never let women into their secrets! Funny—fearful—fatuous old naked misers of knowledge! Poor old timorous autocrats! Once the secret were out and their science known, they would have no more power than anyone else who understood it; and so they are afraid to use their knowledge lest men discover their secret, and they hide like rats in holes—like criminals—for fear of a government that they could utterly destroy in an hour! But I am not afraid! Oh dear no, Mahatma-ji, I am not at all fearful! Your secret is not worth ten seconds' purchase unless it is of use to me!"

"Woman, is your word worth nothing?" asked the Gray Mahatma. "You can not use what you know and keep the secret too. Let those two men escape, and the secret will be blown to the winds within the hour."

She laughed outright at him.

"They shall not escape, old raven-in-a-robe! Here they both remain until they are properly taught and we can depend on them. I love this one," she said, laying a hand on King's shoulder, "but I will torture him until he yields!"

"Better hand both of them over to me," the Mahatma advised. "That kind of thing is a science——"

"Nah! I have seen your methods. This man is a thinker, and I want him in full possession of his thoughts. You may have that one, if you like," she added with a nod in my direction.

JUST then some of her women brought a table in, and spread it with fruit-laden dishes at the far end of the room. Yasmini rose to see whether all was as she wished it, and I got a chance, not only to look through the curtains, but also to whisper to King. He shook his head in reply to my question.

"Could you manage for two, do you think?" he asked; and by that I knew him for a vastly more than usually brave man. Consenting to what you know is sure to destroy you, if the other fellow fails, calls for courage.

"Makes a two to one chance of it," I answered.

"Very well, it's a bet. Give your orders!" said King.

The Mahatma sat rigid in mid-room with closed eyes, as if praying. His hands were crossed on his breast, and his legs twisted into a nearly unimaginable knot. He looked almost comatose.

The shutters and the glass windows were open wide to admit the morning breeze. Nothing was between us and freedom but the fluttering silk curtains and a drop of about seventy feet into an unknown river, between mooring poles that we could see swaying in a tremendously strong current. I knew the water close to the wall was not very deep, because the man who had sung from his boat the night before had been using a pole. But there was likely a good reason why he hugged the wall, and one guess being as good as another until the proof comes, I decided to take a chance on the current having scoured out a fairly deep channel in the river-bed at a little distance from the wall.

"Hold my hand," I said, "and jump your limit outward!"

The Gray Mahatma opened one eye and divined our intention.

"Mad!" he exclaimed. "So then that is the end of them!"

He believed what he said, for he sat still. But Yasmini came running, screaming to her women to prevent us.

King and I took off together, hand-in-hand, and I take my Bible oath that I looked up, and saw Yasmini and the Gray Mahatma leaning out of the window to watch us drown!

Of course, seventy feet is nothing much—provided you are used to the take-off, and know the water, and have a boat waiting handy to pick you up. But we had none of those advantages, and in addition to that we had the grievous handicap that King could not swim a stroke. I would rank as a strong swimmer in almost any company, but you can drown a horse by hanging too much weight to him.

WE TOOK the water feet-first, close together, and that very instant I knew what we were up against. As we plunged under, we were whirled against a sunken pole that whipped and swayed in the current. King was wrenched away from me. When I fought my way to the surface I was already a hundred yards beyond the palace wall, and there was no sign of King, although I could see his turban

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pursuing mine down-stream. We were caught in the strongest current I had ever striven with.

I don't know what persuaded me to turn and try to swim against it for a moment. Instinct, I suppose. It was utterly impossible; I was swept along backwards almost as fast as I had been traveling before. But what the effort did do was to bring me face-up-stream, and so I caught sight of King clinging to a pole and being bobbed under every time the weight of water caused the pole to duck. I managed to cling to a pole myself, although like King it ducked me repeatedly, and it was perfectly evident that neither of us would be alive in the next ten minutes unless a boat should come or I should produce enough brawn and brain for two of us. And there was no boat in sight.

So between ducks I yelled to King to let go and drift down toward me. He did it; and that, I believe, is the utmost test of cold courage to which I have ever seen any man subjected; for even a strong swimmer becomes panic-stricken when he learns he is no longer master of his element. King had the self-control and pluck to lie still and drift down on me like a corpse, and I let go the pole in the nick of time to seize him as his head went under.

Followed a battle royal. Fight how I might, I could not keep both of our heads out of water more than half the time, and King very soon lost the little breath that was left in him. Thereafter, he struggled a bit, but that did not last long, and presently he became unconscious. I believed he was dead.

The choice then seemed to lie between drowning too or letting go of him. I did not dare try the shallows for ninety per cent. of them are quicksands in that river, and more than one army has perished in the effort to force its way across. The only possible safety lay in keeping to mid-stream and sweeping along with the current until something should turn up—a boat—a log—possibly a backwater, or even the breakwater of a bridge.

So I decided to drown, and to annoy the angels of the underworld by taking as long as possible in the process. It made me savage to think that a fellow with King's pluck—who could jump seventy feet from that window, knowing that he could not swim—who could let go that pole even after he had been ducked and three-parts drowned already—should be allowed to die! It seemed to me damnable. I refused to surrender to or ask terms of a providence that could pass such rotten judgment. And I set to work to fight as I had never in my whole life fought before.

It was like swimming in a millrace. The current swirled us this and that way, but everlastingly forward; and whenever some obstruction, such as a sandbank, changed its direction momentarily it simultaneously caused an undertow that submerged us, and it was only by struggling like a Trojan that I could win to the surface and breathe again.

Sometimes the current rolled us over and over on each other, but for fifty per cent. of the time I managed to keep King on top of me, I swimming on my back and holding him by both arms, head nearly out of water. I can't explain exactly why I went to all that trouble, for I was convinced he was dead.

I remember wondering what the next world was going to be like, and whether King and I would meet there, or whether we would each be sent to a sphere suited to our individual requirements—and if so, what my sphere would be like, and whether either of us would ever meet Yasmini, and what she would be doing there. But it never occurred to me once that Athelstan King might be alive yet, or that he and I would be presently treading mother earth again.

I remember several terrific minutes when a big tree came whirling toward us in an eddy, and my legs got tangled up in some part of it that was under water. Then, when I managed to struggle free, King's cotton loin-cloth became wrapped in a tangle of twigs and I could neither wrench nor break him free; whenever I tried it I merely sent myself under and pulled his head after me.

However, that tree suggested the possibility of prolonging the agony a while. In imagination I could see Yama, the god of the Hindu dead, waiting impatiently to bully me for certain past adventures, and I was resolved to keep him waiting as long as possible. I recall that I felt no respect for him. I remember making up my mind to say nothing when stood up in front of him and ordered to give an account of myself.

"My life has been mine, and I've lived it!" I remember retorting—quite possibly aloud. "By —— I'll take my gruel standing up!"

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And with that I seized a branch and tried to take advantage of it, using all my strength and skill to keep the tree from rolling over on King and submerging him completely. I can remember when we whirled under the steel bridge and the tree struck the breakwater of the middle pier; that checked us for a moment, and instead of sending us under, dragged King half out of water, so that he lay after that on top of a branch.

Then the stream got us going again, and swung the butt end of the tree around so that I was forced by it backward through the arch of the bridge; and after that for more than a mile we were waltzed round and round past sand-banks where the alligators lay on the look-out for half-burned corpses from the burning ghats higher up. One great brute caught sight of us, I think, for he plunged into the water as we went by, but perhaps he found some carrion to distract his attention, for although I underwent all the agonies of anticipation I did not see him again.

AT LAST we swung round a curve in the river and came on a quiet bay where they were washing elephants. Thirty of the big brutes were sporting about in the shallows, squirting water over themselves and their mahouts, and about half-a-dozen were lying on their flanks submitting to be scrubbed. The current swung the tree inshore to a point where it struck a submerged sandbank and stuck there; and there we lay with the current racing by, and King bobbing up and down with his head out of water, and I too weak by that time to break off the twig around which his loin-cloth was wrapped.

Not that that would have done any good, for if I had contrived to wrench him free the current would have carried both of us away again instantly. Slack-water was just out of reach. There was a rock a little higher up-stream that stemmed the flow and turned it, so that although we seemed to be well aground and the end of the branch was apparently rooting itself more firmly every moment in the sand, between us and slack-water there rushed the wildest current of all; it might have been pouring out of a sluice-gate, and no living creature, not even an alligator, could have swum across it.

Well, there we were; and after a few minutes I raised enough steam for the whistle at all events. I yelled until my own ear-drums seemed to be bursting and my lungs ached from the pressure on the water in them, and after what seemed an eternity one of the mahouts on shore heard me.

Hope surged triumphant! I could see him wave his arm, and already I saw visions of dry land again, and a disappointed Yama! But I was overlooking one important point: we were in India, where rescues are not undertaken in a hurry, unless you are in the army or some such educational establishment as that. A mahout is a low-caste person. We might be high-caste Brahmins, in which case we should not be touched by any such creatures as cared for elephants.

He called a conference. I saw all the mahouts gather together in one place and stare at us and talk. They swung their arms as they argued; and by the same token the tree also began to swing an arm. It began to look as if it might turn over at any minute. So I yelled and yelled again, and set to work in deadly earnest to release King's loin-cloth before the branch should work over completely and turn his body into alligator-food.

I don't know what argument it was that finally appealed to the mahouts, but after an interminable session one of them fetched a long rope and nine or ten of them climbed on the backs of three big elephants. All the mahouts were shouting at the same time, but they all, and particularly the elephants, seemed to know what was the right thing to do. They worked their way a little bit upstream, and then came as close as the elephants dared. One of the big brutes felt his way cautiously to within twenty yards, and then threw up his trunk and refused to budge another inch.

At that a lean, naked, black man stood up on his rump and payed out the rope downstream. He had to make nine or ten attempts before it finally floated within reach of my hand. Then I made it fast to the tree and, taking King in my right arm, started to work my way along it. It was just as well I did that, and got clear of the branch; for the mahouts passed the rope around the elephant's neck and set him to hauling; he rolled the tree over and over, and that would surely have been the end of King and me if we had been within reach of the overturning branches. As it was I clung to the rope and the elephant hauled the lot of us high and dry.

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CHAPTER XI

"An observant eye is better than a yearning ear, and patience outwears curiosity."

THEN there was a prodigious hullabaloo. The mahouts wanted to discuss the proper amount of remuneration for themselves. Estimates ranged all the way from the cost price of three elephants that might have been drowned, perhaps, and a handful of rupees.

What they could not understand was, why I should want to touch a dead man. By my clothing I was evidently a fairly high-caste Hindu, to whom the touch of the dead is defilement, yet I insisted on rolling King over to examine him; and I think it was my insistence on handling the dead that provided the first inkling that we were not Hindus after all.

At the end of a minute's examination I began to suspect that King was not quite dead, so I recalled the old life-saver's drill and got to work on him. It took time. It was twenty minutes, I should say, before he began to rebel against the agony that pressure on the lungs causes. Then the mahouts were delighted, of course, two lives having been saved instead of one and twice the amount of reward being therefore due.

They were even more pleased, for a moment, when I confessed that both of us were white men; for whatever you like to say about the white man in the East—and there are lots of things that can be said without prevarication—the white man still has a name for honesty and generosity. The price went up to the cost of three elephants, plus. About the only questions undecided in their minds then were, the market price of elephants, and the possible extent of plus.

They were a maharajah's elephants. As King came more and more to his senses, and vomited a bit, and began to behave in all ways like a living man again, I had a chance to talk to the mahouts; and they were just like the members of any other union, preferring conversation to alleged hard labor any day of the week. They told me why the elephants were being washed so early and we enjoyed a regular *conversazione* on the beach.

It appeared the elephants were wanted to take part in a procession. They were to be saddled presently with their jeweled gold and silver howdahs, and were to have blue and vermilion decorations painted on them by an artist retained for the purpose. They pointed out the artist. He was even more naked than the rest of them, because a patch of his skin was missing where one of his dissatisfied "sitters" had bumped him against a wall.

I suggested a wedding, that being the most important source of demand for jeweled and painted elephants. But it was the wrong time of the year, and they laughed at me. So I thought of a coming-of-age, and a betrothal, and a durbar, and a jubilee, and all the other high-class social events that provide a nice lazy life for the elephant-folk, until at last they took compassion on my ignorance.

"*She* has issued invitations to a party for princesses in *her panch mahall*"

Who was *she?* Everybody knew who *she* was! Ask the crows. Ask the vultures. Ask the parokeets. Ask the sparrows in the dust, or the little boy who drives the water-buffaloes. *She* lives in the old palace by the temple of the Tirthankers, and is so wise that even the Gray Mahatma is said to take her into confidence. That was who *she* was.

"The Princess Yasmini?" I suggested.

Whereat they all chuckled and made grimaces, and did everything except acknowledge her name in public. And they looked at me with a new kind of curiosity, as if a person who dared use that name so openly was possibly amphibious after all and therefore hardly to be wondered at for coming out of the river. I caught one of them examining my toes as if he thought I might have webs between them.

And then suddenly Athelstan King decided to sit up and spat some more water out and tried to laugh. And they thought that was so exquisitely funny that they all laughed too. And when King spoke to me in English they seemed to think that was the funniest coincidence of all, and even called on their elephant-folk to throw their trunks up and salute such colossal jesters.

And while they were laughing, and the elephants were lifting up their trunks and pretending to laugh, King smiled wryly with one side of his face and said to me—

"I heard all that."

Then, when he had coughed a little more—

"We're going to attend that party!"

"Why?" I asked him.

"Two reasons." But he had to cough up more water before he could tell them.

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"One: The Gray Mahatma will never rest until he knows we're dead, or done for, and the safest place is close to the enemy; and, two: I never will rest until I know the secret of that science of theirs!"

"How in thunder are we going to get back?" I objected.

"God knows!" he answered.

"These are all the clothes we've got," I said. "Our bag is in her palace, and our money in the bag. These mahouts demand a reward for rescuing us. You're not fit to walk. What are we going to do about it?"

"Ride!" he suggested.

"How—when—where?"

"Elephant—now—to her palace," he answered.

"They're not her elephants."

"So much the better! She'll think the Maharajah knows all about us. She'll *have* to accord us protection after that. Elephants are good. I couldn't ride a horse just yet. Up in the sunshine on old *Hathi's* back I'll soon be all right again. Where are we, by the way?"

He asked a dozen more questions, and finally struggled to his feet.

"My friend," he said then to the chief mahout, "if you propose to take us two sahibs to *her* palace, and be back at your master's stables in time to get ready for the *Bibi-kana*, you'll have to hurry!"

"But I did not propose it!" the mahout answered.

"Nay, the gods proposed it. Which is your fastest elephant?"

"That great one yonder—Akbar, his name is—a bad drunkard and a *badmash** in his cups, but faster on his feet than a racing camel, whether drunk or sober. But who is giving orders? We are a maharajah's servants."

"The gods are ordering all this business!" King assured him. "I wish to ride to *her* palace."

"By *her* leave?"

"By the gods' leave."

"Will the gods pay me?"

"Doubtless. But she will pay first—setting the gods a good example."

"You came from the water like a wet rat, and you are not dressed as a *sahib*. How shall I know you are not an impostor?" the chief mahout demanded.

"Even because I came from the water," King answered. "If you prefer to refuse my reasonable request, what is to stop me from returning into the water and swimming back up-stream and telling tales about you?"

"Swimming up-stream? Ha-Ha! That is fine talk for a fellow who was nearly drowned but a second ago! We took you to be dead!"

"The bigger fools you!" King answered him. "I was asleep. However, very well; I will return into the water and will swim and tell *her* that the chief mahout of——"

"*Sahib*, I was but jesting! *Sahib*, I am the father of three sons. *Huzoor*, forgive me! But how should I have known? *Huzoor*, mount my elephant by all means. Nay, I will make him kneel. Observe, he is a prince of beasts, a very monarch among elephants! Even so he is unworthy to carry your honor, but he is the best we have. Kneel then, Akbar—prince of elephants!—old *rum-tunnel!*—kneel, I say!

"O, ye lazy mahouts, lay on the saddle pad that the *sahib* may ride softly! There will be two *sahibs?* Both will ride the one elephant? That is even better. So. Ho, there! Bring two footboards. Lay the ropes across the pad and let them hang one on either side; thus one *sahib* will balance the other. Thus. So is good. Nay, I myself will drive Akbar, and one shall sit behind me; thus there will be a witness of how much money I am paid for rescuing two princes from the river. Are we ready, *sahibs? Ohé*—then rise, thou father of elephants!"

THE native of India finds it perfectly convenient to ride on a six-inch plank, slung more or less like a house-painter's platform against an elephant's bulging ribs, and it does not seem to make much difference to him when more weight is on one side than on the other. But King and I had to stand and hold each other's hands across the pad; and even so we were by no means too secure, for Akbar resented being taken away from the herd and behaved like a mutinous earthquake. When forty or fifty terrific blows from the *ankus* convinced him at last that forward was the only way to go and going the only course left to him, he trumpeted and bolted.

It was not so far to the city by road, because the river wound a good deal and the road cut straight from point to point. But it was several miles, and we covered it at

* Villain.

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pretty nearly the speed of a railroad train.

In spite of his rage, Akbar had perfect control of himself. Having missed about half his morning swim, and the herd's society, he proposed to miss nothing else, and there was not one cart, one *ekka*, one piled-up load in all those miles that he did not hit and do his utmost to destroy. There was not one yellow dog that he did not give chase to and try to trample on. There was not an umbrella that he did not smash—and there were dozens of umbrellas, for the countryside was coming in to market, and the native of the Punjab loathes the sun. Akbar beat the umbrellas down, wrenched them away, tossed them torn and broken to the four winds, and then screamed and gave chase to some more in the distance.

He stopped to pull the thatch from the roof of a little house beside the road, but as the plying *ankus* made his head ache he couldn't stay long enough to finish that job but scooted up-road again in full pursuit of a Ford car, while an angry man shoved his head through the hole in the roof and cursed all the rumps of all the elephants, together with the forebears and descendants of their owners and their wives. He was a comprehensive swearer, that fellow, but not nearly as comprehensive in his class as Akbar was in his.

It seemed that Akbar was fairly well-known thereabouts. The men in the Ford car shouted the news in advance of his coming, and the road into the city began to look like the track of a routed army. Every man and animal took to his heels, and Akbar trumpeted wild hurrahs as he strained all tendons in pursuit.

There was nothing whatever to do but stay up there and watch the mahout whack him on the skull with the butt-end of the *ankus;* and they were beginning to be half-hearted whacks at that, the mahout being torn between admiration of Akbar's prowess, and fear of damaging the monster's skull beyond repair.

And Akbar was dry-fed, not like the short-winded green-fed, low-caste elephants that can run about as far as an ordinary fat man and then have to stand and heave a while. He needed no second wind, because he never lost his first, but took the whole course as far as the city gate at a speed that would have satisfied Jehu, son of Nimshi, who the Bible says made Israel to sin.

That particular city gate consisted of an arch, covered with carvings of outrageous-looking gods, and as a picture display it was perfect, but as an entrance to a crowded city it possessed no virtue. It was so narrow that only one vehicle could pass at a time, and the whole swarm jammed between it and us like sticks in front of a drain.

And not even Akbar's strength was so great that he could shove them through, so the ancient problem of an irresistible force in contact with an immovable object was presented, and solved by Akbar after a fashion of his own.

He picked the softest spot, which was a wain-load of cotton bales, and upset it, cannoning off that cushion so swiftly as to come within an ace of scattering his four passengers across the landscape; and discerning, with a swift strategic eye that would have done credit to the dashingest cavalry general, that that rout was complete and nothing could be gained by adding to it, he headed for the river and the women's bathing place, took the broad stone steps at a dead run, and plunged straight in.

No ship was ever launched with more perfect aplomb, nor floated more superbly on an even keel than did Akbar at the women's bathing ghat. For a moment I thought he proposed to lie down there and finish his interrupted toilet, but he contented himself with squirting water on the sore spot caused by the thumping *ankus*, and set out to swim up-stream.

It was not until he had reached the second ghat and climbed the steps there that Akbar put himself in Napoleon's class. When he reached the top of the steps no amount of whacking with the *ankus* could make him turn to the right and follow the city street. He turned to the left, tooted a couple of wild hurrahs through his newly wetted whistle, and raced to meet the traffic as it struggled through the gate in single file!

There was ruin ripe for harvest and it looked like the proper time to jump! But suddenly—with that delightful wheeled panic at his mercy, the big brute stopped, stood still and looked at them, muttering and gurgling to himself. Instantly the mahout began petting him, calling him endearing names and praising his wisdom and discretion. I can't swear that the beast understood what was said to him, but he acted exactly as if he did. He picked up dust from the street with his trunk, blew

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a little of it in the general direction of the defeated enemy, blew a little more on himself, and turned his rump toward the gate, as if to signify that hostilities were over!

As he did that, a man who was something of an athlete swung himself up on the offside footboard, and a second later the proud face of the Gray Mahatma confronted me across the saddle-pad alongside King's!

"You are heavy enough to balance the two of us," he said, as if no other comment were necessary. "Why did you run away from me? You can never escape!"

Well, of course anybody could say that after he had found us again.

"Was it you who checked this elephant?" I asked him, remembering what he had done to the black panther and the snakes, but he did not answer.

"Where do you think you are going?" I asked.

"That is what the dry leaves asked of the wind," he answered. "An observant eye is better than a yearning ear, and patience outwears curiosity!"

Suddenly I recalled a remark that King had made on the beach and it dawned on me that by frightening the mahout into silence the Mahatma might undo the one gain we had made by that plunge and swim. As long as the Maharajah who owned the elephant was to hear about our adventure, all was well. News of us would reach the Government. Most of the maharajahs are pro-British, because their very existence as reigning princes depends on that attitude, and they can be relied on to report to the British authorities any irregularity whatever that comes under their notice and at the same time does not incriminate themselves.

The same thought probably occurred to King, but he was rather too recently recovered from drowning to be quick yet off the mark and besides, the Mahatma was between him and the mahout, whereas I had a free field. So I tugged at the arm of the second mahout, who was sitting behind his chief, and he scrambled down beside me.

The Mahatma tried to take immediate advantage of that, and the very thing he did made it all the easier for me to deal with the second mahout, who stared into my face with a kind of puzzled mistrust. The Mahatma, as active as a cat, climbed up behind the chief mahout and sat astride the elephant's neck in the place where the second mahout had been, and began whispering.

"What is your Maharajah's name?" I asked my neighbor on the plank.

"Jihanbthar," he answered, giving a string of titles too that had no particular bearing on the situation. They sounded like a page of the Old Testament.

"You observe that his favorite elephant is about to be stolen with the aid of the Gray Mahatma!"

The fellow nodded, and the expression of his face was not exactly pleased; he may have been one of a crowd that got cursed by the Mahatma for asking too many impertinent questions.

"He has a reputation, that Mahatma, hasn't he?" I suggested. "You have heard of the miracles that he performs?"

He nodded again, displaying the "whites" of his eyes, that were jaundiced into any color but white by the various forms of debauch that his lilliputian salary could be stretched to pay for.

"You see that he is talking to the chief mahout now? Take my word for it, he is casting a spell on him! Would you like to have him cast a spell on you too?"

That suggestion scandalized him horribly, for of all the superstitious people in the world mahouts are the most unhesitatingly credulous. All they know about is elephants; the remainder of the universe is a madhouse full of demons, dreadful chances and the evil eye. He shook his head.

"Run swiftly then, and tell the Maharajah *sahib* to get a Brahman to cancel the spell, and you will be rewarded. Go quickly."

He dropped from the plank and went off at a run just as the Mahatma turned and saw him. The Mahatma had been whispering in the other mahout's ear, and as his eye met mine I laughed. For a moment he watched the man running, and then, as if to demonstrate what a strange mixture of a man he was, he laughed back at me. He acknowledged defeat instantly, and did not appear in the least annoyed by it, but on the contrary appeared to accord me credit for outwitting him, as undoubtedly I had.

INDIA is not a democratic country. Nobody is troubled about keeping the underworld in its place, so mahout or sweeper has the ear of majesty as readily as any other man, if not even more so. And it would not make the slightest difference now what kind of cock

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and bull story the mahout might tell to the Maharajah. However wild it might be it would certainly include the fact that two white men had ridden to Yasmini's palace on the Maharajah's favorite elephant after having been fished out of the river by mahouts at the elephants' bathing ghat.

It was the likeliest thing in the world that representations would be made that very afternoon by telegraph to the nearest important British official, who would feel compelled to make inquiries. The British Government can not afford to have even unknown white men mysteriously made away with.

The Gray Mahatma took all that for granted and nodded comprehendingly. His smile, as we neared Yasmini's palace gate, appeared to me to include a perfect appreciation of the situation. He seemed to accept it as candidly as he had acknowledged my frequent escapes the night before. There was possibly a grain of fatalism in his make-up. As Akbar halted in front of the ancient gate and waited for Ismail to come and open it the Mahatma looked down at me and his expression changed to one of almost friendliness.

"What a strange thing it is," he said, "that the gods confer affection and protection on the biggest fools!"

"What do you know about gods?" I retorted. "You were posing last night as a man who scorned superstition."

"When talking to fools one must use the fools' language," he answered, "else the fools will not understand and energy is wasted." Then he looked down into my eyes again as if he could read the very brain behind them, and added, "You have understood me perfectly!"

Which I take it was his gentle way of emphasizing what he thought of me.

Ismail opened the gate without demur and Akbar sauntered in, being used to palaces. He passed under the first arch into the second courtyard, coming to a halt at a gate on the far side that was too small for his enormous bulk where he proceeded to kneel without waiting for instructions.

"Do you feel proud?" the Mahatma asked me unexpectedly as he climbed off Akbar's neck.

Suspecting some sort of verbal trap I did not answer him.

"You are like this elephant. You are able to do irreparable damage if you see fit. *She* was as apt as usual when she dubbed you Ganesha!"

He was working toward some point he intended to make, like one of those pleasant-tongued attorneys flattering a witness before tying him up in a knot, so I was careful to say nothing whatever. King came around the kneeling elephant and joined us, leaning back against the beast and appraising the Mahatma with his eyes half-closed.

"You're dealing with white men," King suggested. "Why don't you talk in terms that we understand?"

It seemed difficult for the Mahatma to descend to that. He half-closed his eyes in turn and frowned, as if hard put to it to simplify his thoughts sufficiently—something like a mathematician trying to explain himself to the kindergarten class.

"I could kill you," he said, looking straight at King.

King nodded.

"You are not the kind of man who *should* be killed," he went on.

"Did you ever hear the fable of the fox and the sour grapes?" King asked him, and the Mahatma looked annoyed.

"Would you rather be killed?" he retorted.

" 'Pon my soul, I'm inclined to leave that to the outcome," King answered. "Death would mean investigation, and investigation discovery of that science you gave us a glimpse of."

"If I were to let you go," the Mahatma began to argue.

"I would not go! Forward is the only way," King interrupted. "You've a reason for not having us two men killed. What is it?"

"I have no reason whatever for preserving this one's life," the Mahatma answered, glancing at me casually. "For reasons beyond my power of guessing he seems to bear a charmed existence, but he has my leave to visit the next world and his departure would by no means inconvenience me. But you are another matter."

"How so?" King asked. "Mr. Ramsden is the man who would be inquired for. The Indian government, whose servant I no longer am, might ignore me, but the multi-millionaire who is Mr. Ramsden's partner would spend millions and make an international scandal."

"I am thinking of you, not of him. I am thinking you are honest," said the Gray Mahatma, looking into King's eyes.

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"So is he," King answered.

"I am wondering whether or not you are honest enough to trust me," said the Gray Mahatma.

"Why certainly!" King answered. "If you would commit yourself I would trust you. Why not?'

"But this man would not," said the Mahatma, nudging me as if I were the elephant.

"I trust my friend King," I retorted. "If he decides to trust you, I stand back of him."

"Very well then, let us exchange promises."

"Suppose we go a little more cautiously and discuss them first," suggested King.

"I will promise both of you your life, your eventual freedom, and my friendship. Will you promise me not to go in league with *her*——"

"I'll agree to that unconditionally!" King assured him with a dry smile.

"—not to try to learn the secret of the science——"

"Why not?"

"Because if you *should* try I could never save your lives."

"Well, what else?"

"Will you take oath never to disclose the whereabouts of the entrance to the caverns in which you were allowed to see the sciences?"

"I shall have to think that over."

"Furthermore, will you promise to take whatever means is pointed out to you of helping India to independence?"

"What do you mean by independence?"

"Self-government."

"I've been working for that ever since I cut my eye-teeth," answered King. "So has every other British officer and civil servant who has any sense of public duty."

"Will you continue to work for it, and employ the means that shall be pointed out to you?"

"Yes is the answer to the first part. Can't answer the second part until I've studied the means."

"Will you join me in preventing that princess from throwing the world into fresh confusion?"

"Dunno about joining you. It's part of my business to prevent her little game," King answered.

"She has proven herself almost too clever, even for us," said the Mahatma. "She spied on us, and she hid so many witnesses behind a wall pierced with holes that it would be impossible for us to make sure of destroying all of them. And somewhere or other she has hidden an account of what she knows, so that if anything should happen to her it would fall into the hands of the Government and compel investigation."

"Wise woman!" King said smiling.

"Yes! But not so altogether wise. Hitherto we fooled her for all her cleverness. Her price of silence was education in our mysteries, and we have made the education incomprehensible."

"Then why do you want my help?"

"Because she has a plan now that is so magnificent in its audacity as to baffle even our secret council!"

King whistled, and the Mahatma looked annoyed—whether with himself or King I was not sure.

"That is what I have been hunting for three years—your secret council. I knew it existed; never could prove it," said King.

"Can you prove it now?" asked the Mahatma with even more visible annoyance.

"I think so. You'll have to help me."

"I?"

"You or the Princess!" King answered. "Shall I join you or her?"

"Thou fool! There was a sheep who asked, 'Which shall I run with, tiger or wolf?' Consider that a moment!"

King showed him the courtesy of considering it, and was silent for perhaps two minutes, during which the mahout judged it opportune to whine forth his own demands. But nobody took any notice of him.

"You seem check-mate to me," King said at last. "You daren't kill my friend or me. You daren't make away with us. You daren't make away with the Princess. The Princess and several of her women know enough of your secret to be able to force your hand; so do my friend Mr. Ramsden and I. Mr. Ramsden and I have seen sufficient in that madhouse underneath the temple to compel a Government inquiry. Is it peace or war, Mahatma? Will you introduce me to your secret council, or will you fight to a finish?"

"I would rather not fight with you, my young friend."

"Introduce me, then," King answered, smiling.

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"You don't know what you ask—what that involves."

"But I propose to know," said King.

The Mahatma never seemed to mind acknowledging defeat.

"I see you are determined," he said quietly. "Determination, my young friend, combined with ignorance, is a murderer nine times out of ten. However, you do not understand that, and you are determined. I have no authority to make such terms as you propose, but I will submit the matter to those whom you desire to meet. Does that satisfy you?"

King looked immensely dissatisfied.

"I would rather be your friend than your enemy," he answered.

"So said light and darkness each to the other when they first met! You shall have your answer presently. In the mean time will you try not to make my task even more difficult than it already is?"

King laughed uncomfortably.

"Mahatma, I like you well enough, but no terms until I have your answer! Sorry! I'd like to be friends with you."

"The pity of it is that though you are honestly determined you are bound to fail," the Mahatma answered; and at that he dismissed the whole subject with a motion of one hand, and turned toward Ismail, who was lurking about in the shadows like a wolf.

It would be hard to imagine a stranger sight than to see that great savage Afridi go down on hands and knees the moment an ostensible Hindu paid the least attention to him. An Afridi despises the Hindu even more than an Arab affects to scorn and loathe the Jew.

THE Mahatma paid no attention to the grovelings, but sent the man to the door of the *panch mahal* with a message that money was needed; and the mahout spent the next ten minutes in loud praises of his kneeling elephant, presumably on the theory that "it pays to advertise," for it is not only the West that worships at that shrine.

When Ismail came back with a tray on which were several little heaps of money the mahout went into abject ecstacies of mingled jubilee and reverence. His mouth betrayed unbelief and his eyes glinted avarice. His fingers twitched with agonied anticipation, and he began to praise his elephant again, as some people recite proverbs to keep themselves from getting too excited.

The various heaps of money on the tray must have amounted to about fifty dollars. The mahout spread out the end of his turban by way of begging bowl, and the Mahatma shook all the money into it, so that Ismail gasped and the mahout himself turned up his eyes in exquisite delirium.

"Go, or you will be too late!" was all the Mahatma said to him, and the mahout did not wait for a second command, but mounted his elephant's neck, kicked the big brute up and rode away, in a hurry to be off before he should wake up and discover that the whole adventure was a dream.

But he could not get away with it as easily as all that. Ismail was keeper of the gate, and the gate was locked. Akbar doubtless could have broken down the gate if so instructed, but even the East, which is never long on gratitude, would hardly do that much damage after receiving such a royal largesse. Ismail went to unlock the gate, and demanded his percentage, giving it, though, the Eastern name, which means "the usual thing."

And the usual argument took place—I approached to listen to it—the usual recriminations, threats, counterclaims, abuse, appeals to various deaf deities, and finally concession—after Ismail had made the all-compelling threat to tell the other mahouts how much the gift had amounted to. I suppose it was instinct that suggested that idea. At any rate, it worked and the mahout threw a handful of coins to him.

Thereat, of course, there was immediate, immense politeness on both sides. Ismail prayed that Allah might make the mahout as potbellied and idle as his elephant; and the mahout suggested to a dozen corruptible deities that Ismail might be happier with a thousand children and wives who were true to him. Whereat Ismail opened the gate, and Akbar helped himself liberally to sugar-cane from a passing wagon; so that every one was satisfied except the rightful owner of the sugar-cane, who cursed and wept and called Akbar an honest rajah, by way I suppose of expressing his opinion of all the tax-levying powers that be.

There happened to be a thing they call a "constabeel" going by, and the owner of the sugar-cane appealed to him for justice and relief. So the "constabeel" prodded

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Akbar's rump with his truncheon, and helped himself, too, to sugar-cane by way of balancing accounts. And while the owner of the sugar-cane was bellowing red doctrine about that, Ismail went out and helped himself likewise, only more liberally, carrying in an armful of the stuff, and slamming the gate in the faces of all concerned. In cynical enjoyment of the blasphemy outside he sat down then in the shadow of the wall to chew the cane and count the change extorted from the mahout.

"Behold India self-governed!" I said, turning to beckon through the arch between the two courtyards.

But the Mahatma was gone! And unlike the Chesire cat, he had not even left a smile behind him—had not even left Athelstan King behind him. The two had disappeared as silently and as utterly as if they had never been there!

CHAPTER XII

"In that case . . . there will be nothing left for the alligators."

I HUNTED about, looked around corners, searched the next courtyard, and drew blank. Then I asked Ismail, and he mocked me.

"The Mahatma? You are like those fools who pursue virtue. There never was any!"

"That mahout named you rightly just now," said I. "He knew your character perfectly."

"That may be," Ismail answered, rising to his feet. "But he was on an elephant where I could not reach him. You think you are a strong man? Feel of that then!"

He was old, but no mean adversary. Luckily for him he did not draw a knife. I hugged the wind out of him, whirled him until he was dizzy and threw him down into his dog's corner by the gate, not much the worse except for a bruise or two.

"Now!" I said. "Which way went King sahib and the Gray Mahatma?"

"All ways are one, and the one way leads to *her!*"

That was all that I could get out of him. So I took the one way, straight down through the courtyards and under arches, past the old black panther's cage—the way that King and I had taken when we first arrived. But it seemed like a year since I had trodden those ancient flagstones side-by-side with King—more than a year! It seemed as if a dozen lifetimes intervened. And it also occurred to me that I was growing famished and desperately sleepy, and I knew that King must be in even worse condition. The old, black panther was sleeping as I went by, and I envied him.

There was a choice of two ways when I reached the *panch mahal*, for it was feasible to enter through the lower door, which was apparently unguarded, and climb the stone stairway that wound inside the wall. However, I chose the marble front steps, and barked my knuckles on the door at the top.

I was kept waiting several minutes, and then four women opened it in place of the customary two; and instead of smiling, as on previous occasions, they frowned, lining up across the threshold. They were older women than the others had been, and looked perfectly capable of showing fight; allowing for their long pins and possible hidden weapons I would not have given ten cents for my chance against them. So I asked for King and the Mahatma.

They pretended not to understand. They knew no Hindustani. My dialect of Punjabi was as Greek to them. They knew nothing about my clothes, or the suitcase that King and I shared between us and that, according to Yasmini, had been carried by her orders to the palace. The words "King" and "Mahatma" seemed to convey no meaning to them. They made it perfectly obvious that they suspected me of being mad.

I began to suspect myself of the same thing! Feeling as sleepy as I did, it was not unreasonable to suspect myself at any rate of dreaming; yet I had sufficient power of reasoning left to argue that if those were dream-women they would give way in front of me. So I stepped straight forward, and they no more gave way than a she-bear will if you call on her when she is nursing cubs. Two more women stepped out from behind the curtains with long, slithery daggers in their hands, and somehow I was not minded to test whether those were dream-daggers or not.

It was a puzzle to know what to do. The one unthinkable thing would be to leave King unsought for. Suddenly it occurred to me to try that door underneath the steps; so I kissed my hand irreverently to the quarterguard of harridans, and

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turned my back on them—which I daresay was the most unwise move that I ever made in my whole life. I have done things that were more disastrous in the outcome, but never anything more deserving of ruin.

HAVE you ever been tackled, tripped and hog-tied by women? It is bad enough, Lord knows, to be manhandled by a couple of hospital nurses, when you are after all grateful for indignity they put you to. But the most exasperating, damnable, demeaning, desperate sensation in the world is being helpless in the hands of a female enemy! Run rather than risk it! Hide! Accept the stigma of cowardice—anything! Only don't be caught and overwhelmed by them!

They threw a rope over my shoulders from behind, and I felt the foot of one termagant in the small of my back as she hauled taut. I spun round and stepped forward to slacken the noose and free myself, and two more nooses went over my head in swift succession. Another caught my right foot—another my right hand! More women came, with more ropes. It was only a matter of seconds before they were almost dragging me asunder as they hauled, two hags to a rope, and every one of them straining as if the game were tug-of-war.

There was nothing else to do, and plenty of inducement, so I did it. I yelled. I sent my voice bellowing through those echoing halls to such tune that if King were anywhere in the place he would have to hear me. But it did me no good. They only produced a gag and added that to my discomfort, shoving a great lump of rubber in my mouth and wrapping a towel over it so tightly that I could hardly breathe.

Then came Yasmini, gorgeously amused, standing at the top of the steps where the inner hall was raised a few feet above the outer, and ordering me blindfolded as well as rendered dumb.

"For if he can see as well as he can roar he will presently know too much," she explained sarcastically.

So they wrapped another towel over my eyes and pinned it with a cursed export safety-pin that pierced clean through my scalp. And the harder I struggled, the tighter they pulled on the ropes and the louder Yasmini laughed, until I might as well have been on that rack that King and I saw in the cavern underneath the temple.

"So strong *Ganesha-jil*" she mocked. "So strong and yet so impotent! Such muscles! Look at them! Can the buffalo hear, or are his ears stopped too?"

A woman rearranged the head-towel to make sure that my ears were missing nothing; after which Yasmini purred her pleasantest.

"O buffalo Ganesha, I would have you whipped to death if I thought that would not anger Athelstan! What do you mistake me for? A light o' love, to be mocked and run away from? Me, who have been twice a queen! That was a mighty jump from my window; and even as the buffalo you swam, Ganesha! Buffalo, buffalo! Who but a buffalo would snatch my Athelstan away from me, and then return alone! What have you done with him? Hah! You would like to answer that you have done nothing with him—buffalo, buffalo! He would never have left you willingly, nor you him—you two companions who share one foolish little bag between you!

"Does he love you? Hope, Ganesha! Hope that he loves you! For unless he comes to find you, Ganesha, all the horrors that you saw last night, and all the deaths, and all the tortures shall be yours—with alligators at last to abolish the last traces of you! Do you like snakes, Ganesha? Do you like a madhouse in the dark? I think not. Therefore, Ganesha, you shall be left to yourself to think a little while. Think keenly! Invent a means of finding Athelstan and I will let you go free for his sake. But—fail—to think—of a successful plan—Ganesha—and you shall suffer in every atom of your big body! Bass! Take him away!"

I was frog-marched, and flung face-downward on to cushions, after which I heard a door snap shut and had leisure to work myself free from the ropes and gag and towels. It took time, for the hussies had drawn the cords until they bit into the muscles, and maybe I was twenty minutes about getting loose. Then, for ten minutes more I sat and chafed the rope-cuts, craving food, examining the room, and wishing above all things that conscience would let me fall asleep on the feathery, scented pillows with which the floor was strewn, rather than stay awake on the off-chance of discovering where King might be.

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IT WAS practically a bare room, having walls of painted wood that sounded solid when I made the circuit of the floor and tapped each panel in turn. But that proved nothing, for even the door sounded equally solid; the folk who built that palace used solid timber, not veneer, and as I found out afterward the door was nearly a foot thick. On the floor I could make no impression whatever by thumping, and there was no furniture except the pillows—nothing that I could use for a weapon.

But there were the cotton ropes with which they had bound me, and before doing anything else I knotted them all into one. I had no particular reason for doing that beyond the general principle that one long rope is usually better than half-a-dozen short ones in most emergencies.

There was only one window, and that was perhaps two feet high, big enough, that is, to scramble through, but practically inaccessible, and barred. The only weapon I had was that infernal brass safety-pin that had held the towel to my scalp, and I stuck that away in my clothes like a magpie hiding things on general principles.

I began to wonder whether it would not be wisest after all to lie down and sleep. But I was too hungry to sleep, and it was recognition of that fact which produced the right idea.

Beyond doubt Yasmini realized that I was hungry. She had threatened me with tortures, and was likely to inflict them if she should think that necessary; but nothing seemed more unlikely than that she would keep me for the present without food and water. It would be bad strategy, to say the least of it. She had admitted that she did not want to offend King.

The more I considered that, the more worth while it seemed to bet on it; and as I had nothing to bet with except will power and personal convenience, I plunged with both and determined to stay awake as long as human endurance could hold out.

There was only one way that food could possibly be brought into the room, and that was through the massive teak-wood door. It was in the middle of the wall, and opened inward; there were no bolts on the inside. Anybody opening it cautiously would be able to see instantly all down the length of half that wall, and possibly two-thirds of the room as well.

It would have been hardly practical to stand against the door and hit at the first head that showed, for then if the door should open suddenly, it would strike me and give the alarm. There was nothing else for it but to stand well back against the wall on the side of the door on which the hinges were; and as that would make the range too long for quick action I had to invent some other means of dealing with the owner of the first head than jumping in and punching it.

There was nothing whatever to contrive a trap with but the cotton rope and the safety-pin, but the safety-pin like Mohammed's Allah, "made all things possible." I stuck that safety-pin in the woodwork and hung the noose in such position that the least jerk would bring it down over an intruding head—practised the stunt for ten or fifteen minutes, and then got well back against the wall with the end of the line in hand, and waited.

I have read Isaac Walton, and continue unconvinced. I still class fishing and golf together with tiddledywinks, and eschew all three as thoughtfully as I avoid bazaars and "crushes" given by the ladies of both sexes. The rest of that performance was too much like fishing with a worm to suit my temperament, and although I caught more in the end than I ever took with rod and line, the next half-hour was boredom pure and simple, multiplied to the point of torture by intense yearning for sleep.

But patience sometimes is rewarded. I very nearly was asleep when the sound of a bolt being drawn on the far side of the door brought every sense on the *qui vive* with that stinging feeling that means blood spurting through your veins after a spell of lethargy. The bolt was a long time drawing, as if some one were afraid of making too much noise, and I had plenty of time to make sure that my trap was in working order.

And when the door opened gingerly at last, a head inserted itself, my noose fell, and I hauled taut, I don't know which was most surprized—myself or the Gray Mahatma! I jerked the noose so tight that he could not breathe, let alone argue the point. I reckon I nearly hanged him, for his neck jammed against the door, and I did not dare let go for fear he might withdraw himself and collapse on the wrong side. I wanted him *in*side, and in a hurry.

He was about two-thirds unconscious

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when I seized him by his one long lock of hair and hauled him in, shutting the door again and leaning my weight against it, while I pried the noose free to save him from sure death. Those cotton ropes don't render the way a hemp one would. And while I was doing that a sickening, utterly unexpected sound announced that somebody outside the door had cautiously shot the bolt again! The Mahatma and I were both prisoners!

I sat the old fellow down on a cushion in a corner and chafed his neck until the blood performed its normal office of revivifying him. And as he slowly opened first one eye and then the other, instead of cursing me as I expected, he actually smiled.

"The quality of your mercy was rather too well strained," he said in English, "but I thank you for the offer nevertheless!"

"Offer?" I answered. "What offer have I made you?"

"A very friendly offer. But the penalty of being in the secret of our sciences is that we may not die, except in the service of the cause. Therefore, my friend, your goodwill fell on barren ground, for if you had succeeded in killing me my obligation would have been held to pass to you, and you would have suffered terribly."

"Who locked the door on us just now?" I asked him.

"I don't know," he answered, smiling whimsically.

"Very well," I said, "suppose you work one of your miracles! You and King disappeared a while ago simply perfectly from right alongside me. Can you repeat the process here and spirit me away?"

He shook his head.

"My friend, if your eyes had not been fixed on things unworthy of consideration such as an elephant's rump and the theft of sugar-cane, you would have seen us go."

"How did you persuade King to leave me standing there without a word of warning?" I demanded.

"How were you persuaded into this place?" he retorted.

"You mean you gagged and bound him?"

He smiled again.

"Your friend was weak from having so nearly been drowned; nevertheless, you overestimate my powers!"

"When I first met you, you gripped my hand," I answered. "I am reckoned a strong man, yet I could not shift your hand a fraction of an inch. Now you suggest that you are weaker than a half-drowned man. I don't understand you."

"Of course you don't. That is because you don't understand the form of energy that I used on the first occasion. Unfortunately I can only use it where arrangements have been made in advance. It is as mechanical as your watch, only a different kind of mechanics—something, in fact, that some of your western scientists would say has not yet been invented."

"Well, where's King?" I asked him.

"Up-stairs. He asked me to bring you. Now how can I?"

He smiled again with that peculiar whimsical helplessness that contrasted so strangely with his former arrogance. He who had looked like a lion when we first encountered him seemed now to be a meek, and rather weak old man—much weaker in fact than could be accounted for by the red ring that my noose had made on his neck.

"Is King at liberty?" I demanded.

"And what do you call liberty?" he asked me blandly, as if he were really curious to know my opinion on that subject.

"Can he come and go without molestation?"

"If he cares to run that risk, and is not caught. Try not to become impatient with me! Anger is impotence! Explanations that do not explain are part and parcel of all religions and most sciences; therefore why lose your temper? Your friend is free to come and go, but must take his chance of being caught. He pursues investigations."

"Where?"

"Where else than in this palace? Listen!"

Among all the phenomena of nature there is none more difficult to explain than sound. Hitherto in that teak-lined room we had seemed shut off from the rest of the world completely, for the door and walls were so thick and the floor so solid that sound-waves seemed unable to penetrate. Yet now a noise rather like sandpaper being chafed together began to assert itself so distinctly as to seem almost to have its origin in the room. In a way it resembled the forest noise when a breeze stirs the tree-tops at night—irregular enough, and yet with a kind of pulse in it, increasing and decreasing.

"You recognize that?" asked the Mahatma.

I shook my head.

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"Veiled women, walking!"

"You mean the princesses have come?"

"A few, and their attendants."

"How many princesses?"

"Oh, not more than twenty. But each will bring at the least twenty attendants, and perhaps a score of friends, each of whom in turn will have her own attendants. And only the princesses and their friends will enter the audience hall, which, however, will be surrounded by the attendants, whose business it will be to see that no stranger, and above all no male shall see or overhear."

"And if they were to catch Athelstan King up there?"

"That would be his last and least pleasant experience in this world!"

That was easy enough to believe. It was always worse to fall into the hands of women than of men, as the legends of Bacchantes testify. No doubt that was the reason why the Greeks classified Harpies as females. Besides, I had just had an experience of what those palace women could do.

"She, who learned our secrets, will take care that none shall play that trick on *her*," the Mahatma went on confidently. "These women will use the audience hall she lent to us. Their plan is to control the new movement in India, and their strength consists in secrecy. They will take all precautions."

"Do you mean to tell me," I demanded, "that as you sit here now you are impotent? Can't you work any of your tricks?"

"Those are not tricks, my friend, they are sciences. Can your western scientists perform to order without their right environment and preparations?"

"Then you can't break that door down, or turn loose any magnetic force?"

"You speak like a superstitious fool," he retorted calmly. "The answer is no."

"That," said I, "is all that I was driving at. Do you see this?" And I held my right fist sufficiently close to his nose to call urgent attention to it. "Tell me just what transpired between you and King from the time when you disappeared out there in the courtyard until you came in here alone!"

"No beating in the world could make me say a word," he answered calmly. "You would only feel horribly ashamed."

I believed him, and sat still, he looking at me in the sort of way in which a connoisseur studies a picture with his eyelids a little lowered.

"Nevertheless," he went on presently, "I observe that I have misjudged you in some respects. You are a man of violent temper, which is cave-man foolishness; yet you have prevailing judgment, which is the beginning of civilization. There is no reason why I should not tell you what you desire to know, even though it will do you no good."

"I listen," I answered, trying to achieve that air of humility with which *chelas* listen to their *gurus*.

That was partly because I really respected the man in a way; and partly because there was small harm in flattering him a little, if that could induce him to tell me the more.

"KNOW then," he began, "that it was my fault that the Princess Yasmini was able to play that trick on us. It was to me that she first made the proposal that we should use her audience hall for our conference. It was I who conveyed that proposal to those whom it concerned, and I who persuaded them. It was through my lack of diligence that the hiding-place was overlooked in which she and certain of her women lay concealed, so that they overheard some of our secrets.

"For that I should have been condemned to death at once, and it would have been better if that had been done.

"Yet for fifty years I have been a man of honor. And although it is one of our chief requirements that we lay aside such foolishness as sentiment, nevertheless the seeds of sentiment remained, and those men were loath to enforce the penalty on me, who had taught so many of them.

"So they compromised, which is inevitably fatal. For compromise bears within itself the roots of right and wrong, so that whatever good may come of it must nevertheless be ruined by inherent evil. I bade them use me for their studies, and have done with compromise, but being at fault my authority was gone, so they had their way.

"They imposed on me the task of making use of the Princess Yasmini, and of employing her by some means to make a beginning of the liberation of India. And she sought to make use of me to get Athelstan King into her clutches. Moreover, believing that her influence over us was now too great to be resisted, she demanded that Athelstan King and yourself should be

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shown sciences; and I consented, believing that thereby your friend might be convinced, and would agree to go to the United States to shape public opinion.

"Thereafter you know what happened. You know also that, because the seeds of compromise were inherent in the plan, my purpose failed. Instead of consenting to go to the United States Athelstan King insisted on learning our sciences. You and he escaped, by a dive from the upper window of this palace that would not have disgraced two fish-hawks, and although you never guessed it, by that dive you sentenced me to death.

"For I had to report your escape to those whom it most concerned. And at once it was obvious to them that you were certain to tell what you had seen.

"Nevertheless, there was one chance remaining that you might both be drowned; and one chance that you might be recaptured before you could tell any one what you had seen. And there was a third chance that, if you should be recaptured, you might be persuaded to promise never to reveal what little of our secrets you already know. In that case, your lives might be spared, although not mine."

So it was laid upon me to discover where you were, and to bring you back if possible. And on the polished table in that cave in which you saw Benares and Bombay and London and New York, I watched you swim down the river until you were rescued by the elephants.

"So then I went to meet you and bring you back."

"What if we had refused?"

"That elephant you rode—hah! One word from me, and the mob would have blamed you for the damage. They would have pulled you from the elephant and beaten you to death. Such processes are very simple to any one who understands mob-passions. Just a word—just a hint—and the rest is inevitable."

"But you say you are under sentence of death. What if you should refuse to obey them?"

"Why refuse? What good would that do?"

"But you were at liberty. Why not run away?"

"Whither? Besides, should I, who have enforced the penalty of death on so many fools, disloyal ones and fanatics, reject it for myself when I myself have failed? There is nothing unpleasant about death, my friend, although the manner of it may be terrible. But even torture is soon over; and the sting is gone from torture when the victim knows that the cause of science is thereby being advanced. They will learn from my agonies."

"Suit yourself!" I urged him. "Each to his own amusement. What happened after I turned to watch the elephant at the gate?"

"Those on whom the keeping of our secrets rests considered that none would believe you, even if you were to tell what you have seen. But Athelstan King is different. For many years the Indian government has accepted his bare word. Moreover, we knew that we can also accept his word. He is a man whose promises are as good as money, as the saying is.

"So after you turned aside to watch an elephant, those who were watching us opened a hidden door and Athelstan King was made prisoner from behind. They carried him bound and gagged into a cavern such as those you visited; and there he was confronted by the Nine Unknown, who asked him whether or not he will promise never to reveal what he had seen."

The Mahatma paused.

"Did he promise?" I asked him.

"He refused. What was more, he dared them to make away with him, saying that the mahout who had accompanied us hither would already have informed the Maharajah Jihanbihar, who would certainly report to the Government. And I, standing beside him, confirmed his statement."

"You seem to have acted as prosecuting attorney against yourself!" I said.

"No; I simply told the truth," he answered. "We who calculate in terms of eternity and infinity have scant use for untruth. I told the Nine Unknown the exact truth—that this man Athelstan King might not be killed, because of the consequences; and that whatever he might say to certain officers of the Government would be believed. So they let him go again, and set midnight tonight as the hour of the beginning of my death."

"Did King know that his refusal to promise entailed your death?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"Why didn't you tell him?"

"Because it would not have been true, my

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friend. I had already been sentenced to death. His promise could make no possible difference to my fate. They let him go, and ordered me to present myself at midnight; so I went with him, to preserve him from the cobras in a tunnel through which he must pass.

I brought him into this palace by hidden ways, and after I had shown him the audience hall, where these Princesses are to meet, he asked me to go and find you—that being easier for me than for him, because none in this palace would be likely to question me, whereas he would be detected instantly and watched, even if not prevented. And when I had found you—and you nearly killed me—some one, as you know, locked the door and shut us in here together. It is all one to me," he added with a shrug of the shoulders; "I have only until midnight in any event, and it makes small difference where I spend the intervening hours. Perhaps you would like to sleep a little? Why not? Sleep, and I will keep watch."

But, badly though I needed sleep, that sort of death-watch did not quite appeal. Besides, gentle, and honest and plausible though the Gray Mahatma now seemed, there was still something within me that rebelled at trusting him entirely. He had been all along too mysterious, and mystery is what irritates most of us more than anything else. It needs a man like Athelstan King to recognize the stark honesty of such a man as that Gray Mahatma; and Athelstan King was not there to set the example. I preferred to keep awake by continuing to question him.

"And d'you mean that those devils will deliberately torture you to death after you surrender voluntarily?" I asked.

"They are not devils," he answered solemnly.

"But they'll torture you?"

"What is called torture can hardly fail to accompany the process they will put me through—especially if I am to be honored as I hope."

"It seems to me 'much learning hath made thee mad,' my friend!" said I.

He shook his head again, but took no offense.

"For a long time we have sought to make one experiment for which no suitable subject could be found. For centuries it has been believed that a certain scientific step is possible; but the subject on whom the experiment is tried must be one who knows all our secrets and well understands the manipulation of etheric vibrations. It is seldom that such an one has to be sentenced to death. And it is one of our laws that death shall never be imposed on any one not deserving of it. There are many, myself included, who would cheerfully have offered ourselves for that experiment at any time, had it been allowed."

"So you're really almost contented with the prospect?" I suggested.

"No, my friend. I am discontented. And for this reason. It may be that the Nine Unknown, who are obliged by the oath of our order to be stern and devoid of sentiment, will discover how pleased I would be to submit myself to that experiment. And in that case, in place of that experiment they would feel obliged merely to repeat some test that I have seen a dozen times."

"And throw your body to the alligators afterwards?"

"In that case, yes. But if what I hope takes place there will be nothing left for the alligators—nothing but bones without moisture in them that will seem ten centuries old."

CHAPTER XIII

"Think! Think for yourselves!"

THE Gray Mahatma sat still, contemplating with apparent equanimity his end that should begin at midnight, and I sat contemplating him, when suddenly a new idea occurred to me.

"You intend to surrender to your executioners at midnight?" I asked him.

He nodded gravely.

"Suppose she keeps us locked in here; what then? You say you can't use your science to get out of here. What if you're late for the assignation?"

"You forget," he said with a deprecating gesture, "that they can see exactly where I am at any time! If they enter the cavern of vision and turn on the power they can see us now, instantly. They know perfectly well that my intention is to surrender to them. Therefore they will take care to make my escape from this place possible."

Five minutes later the door opened suddenly, and six women marched in. Two of them had wave-edged daggers, two had

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clubs, and the other two brought food and water. It was pretty good food, and there was enough of it for two; but the women would not say a word in answer to my questions.

They set the food and water down and filed out one by one, the last one guarding the retreat of all the rest and slipping out backward, pulling the door shut after her. Whereat I offered the Mahatma food and drink, but he refused the hot curry and only accepted a little water from the brass caraffe.

"They will feed me special food tonight, for I shall need my strength," he explained; but the explanation was hardly satisfying.

I did not see how he could be any stronger later on for having let himself grow weaker in the interval. Nevertheless, I have often noticed this—that the East can train athletes by methods absolutely opposite to those imposed by trainers in the West, and it may be that their asceticism is based on something more than guesswork. I ate enormously, and he sat and watched me with an air of quiet amusement. He seemed to grow more and more friendly all the time, and to forget that he had made several attempts on my life, although his yellow eyes and lionlike way of carrying his head still gave you an uncomfortable feeling, not of mistrust but of incomprehension.

I began to realize how accurately King had summed him up; he was an absolutely honest man, which was why he was dangerous. His standards of conduct and motives were utterly different from ours, and he was honest enough to apply them without compromise or warning, that was all. I think he was almost, if not quite entirely free from personal spite or vindictiveness, and although he was certainly not sentimental, I believe he felt the same sort of compassionate interest in me that I might feel toward a hungry dog that knew no better than to fill its stomach with the first warm food available.

I was curious about his death sentence, and also anxious to keep awake, so I questioned him further, asking him pointblank what kind of experiment they were going to try on him, and what would be the use of it. He meditated for about five minutes before answering:

"Is it within your knowledge that those who make guns seek ever to make them powerful enough to penetrate the thickest armor; and that the men who make armor seek always to make it strong enough to resist the most powerful guns, so that first the guns are stronger, and then the armor, and then the guns and then the armor again, until nations groan beneath the burden of extravagance? You know that?

"Understand, then, that that is but imitation of a higher law. A fragment of the force that we control is greater than the whole power of all the guns in the world, and forever we are seeking the knowledge of how to protect ourselves against it, so that we may safely experiment with higher potencies. As we learn the secret of safety we increase the power, and then learn more safety, and again increase the power. Perpetually there comes a stage at which we dare not go forward—yet—because we do not yet know what the result of higher potencies will be on our own bodies. Do you understand me? So. There will be an experiment tonight to ascertain the utmost limit of our present ability to resist the force."

"You mean they'll try the force on you?"

He nodded.

"Why not use an alligator? There are lots of creatures that die harder than a human being."

"It must be one who understands," he answered. "Not even a neophyte would do. It must be one of iron courage, who will resist to the last, enduring agony rather than letting in death that would instantly end the agony. It must be one who knows the full extent of all our knowledge, and can therefore apply all our present resources of resistance, so that the very outside edge of safety, as it were, may be measured accurately."

"And how long is the process likely to last?" I asked him.

"Who knows?" he answered. "Possibly three days, or longer. They will feed me scientifically, and will increase the potencies gradually, in order to observe the exact effects at different stages. And some of the more painful stages they will repeat again and again, because the greater the pain the greater the difficulty of registering exact degrees of resistance. The higher vibrations are not by any means always the most painful, any more than the brightest colors or the highest notes are always the most beautiful."

"Then you are to use your knowledge of

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resistance against their knowledge of force—is that it?"

He nodded.

"Isn't there a chance then that you may hold out to a point that will satisfy them? A point, I mean, at which you'll be more useful to them alive than dead? Surely if you should live and tell them all about it that would serve the purpose better than to have you dead and silent forever?"

He smiled like a school teacher turning down a promising pupil's suggestion.

"They will vibrate every atom of flesh and every drop of moisture from my bones before they have finished," he answered, "and they will do it as gradually as possible seeking to ascertain exactly the point at which human life ceases to persist. My part will be to retain my faculties to the very end, in order to exercise resistance to the last. So a great deal depends on my courage. It is possible that this experiment may carry science forward to a point where it commences a new era, for if we can learn to survive the higher potencies a whole new realm will lie before us awaiting exploration."

"And if you refuse?"

"A dog's death!"

"Have they no use for mercy?"

"Surely. But mercy is not treason. It would be treason to the cause to let me live. I failed. I let the secret out. I *must* die. That is the law. If they let me live, the next one who failed would quote the precedent, and within a century or so a new law of compromise would have crept in. Our secrets would be all out, and the world would use our knowledge to destroy itself. No. They show their mercy by making use of me, instead of merely throwing my dead carcass to the alligators."

"If you will tell me your real name I will tell them at Johns Hopkins about your death, and perhaps they will inscribe your record on some roll of martyrs," I suggested.

I think that idea tempted him, for his eyes brightened and grew strangely softer for a moment. He was about to speak, but at that moment the door opened again, and things began to occur that drove all thought of Johns Hopkins from our minds.

About a dozen women entered this time. They did not trouble to tie the Mahatma, but they bound me as the Philistines did Samson, and then threw a silken bag over my head by way of blindfold. The bag would have been perfectly effective if I had not caught it in my teeth as they drew it over my shoulders. It did not take long to bite a hole in it, nor much longer to move my head about until I had the hole in front of my right eye, after which I was able to see fairly well where they were leading me.

Women of most lands are less generous than men to any one in their power. Men would have been satisfied to let me follow them along or march in front of them, provided I went fast enough to suit them, but those vixens hardly treated me as human. Perhaps they thought that unless they beat, shoved, prodded and kicked me all the way along those corridors and up the gilded stairs I might forget who held the upper hand for the moment; but I think not. I think it was simply sex-venom—the half-involuntary vengeance that the under-dog inflicts on the other when positions are reversed. When India's women finally break purdah and enter politics openly, we shall see more cruelty and savagery, for that reason, than either the French or Russian terrors had to show.

I was bruised and actually bleeding in a dozen places when they hustled me down a corridor at last, and crowded me into a narrow anteroom, where the two harridans who had handled me hardest had the worst of it. I gave them what in elephant stables is known as the "squeeze," crushing them to right and left against projecting walls; whereat they screamed, and I heard the reproving voice of the Mahatma just behind me:

"Violence is the folly of beasts. Patience and strength are one!"

But they were not sticking pins into his ribs and thighs to humiliate and discourage him. He was being led by either hand, and cooed to softly in the sort of way that members of the Dorcas Guild would treat a bishop. It was easy enough for him to feel magnanimous. I managed to tread hard on one foot, and to squeeze two more women as they shoved me through a door into a vast audience hall, and the half-suppressed screams were music in my ears. I don't see why a woman who uses pins on a prisoner should be any more immune than a man from violent retaliation.

When they had shut the door they stripped the silk bag off over my head and, holding me by the arms, four on either side,

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dragged me to the middle of a hall that was at least as large as Carnegie Hall in New York, and two or three thousand times as sumptuous.

I STOOD on a strip of carpet six feet wide, facing a throne that faced the door I had entered by. The throne was under a canopy, and formed the center of a horseshoe ring of gilded chairs, on every one of which sat a heavily veiled woman. Except that they were marvelously dressed in all the colors of the rainbow and so heavily jeweled that they flashed like the morning dew, there was nothing to identify any of the women except one. She was Yasmini. And she sat on the throne in the center, unveiled, unjeweled, and content to outshine all of them without any kind of artificial aid.

She sat under a hard white light directed from behind a lattice in the wall that would have exaggerated the slightest imperfection of looks or manner; and she looked like a fairy-book queen—like the queen you used to think of in the nursery when your aunt read stories to you and the illustrated Sunday supplements had not yet disillusioned you as to how queens wear their hats.

She was Titania, with a touch of Diana the Huntress, and decidedly something of Athena, goddess of wisdom, clothed in flowing cream that showed the outlines of her figure, and with sandals on her bare feet. Not a diamond. Not a jewel of any kind. Her hair was bound up in the Grecian fashion and shone like yellow gold.

Surely she seemed to have been born for the very purpose of presiding. Perhaps she was the only one who was at ease, for the others shifted restlessly behind their veils and had that vague, uncertain air that goes with inexperience—although one woman, larger-looking than the rest, and veiled in embroidered black instead of colors, sat on a chair near the throne with a rather more nervy-looking outline. There were more than a hundred women in there all told.

Yasmini's change of countenance at sight of my predicament was instantaneous. I don't doubt it was her fault that I had been mistreated on the way up, for these women had seen me bound by her orders and mocked by her a couple of hours previously. But now she saw fit to seem indignant at the treatment I had suffered, and she made even the ranks of veiled princesses shudder as she rose and stormed at my captors, giving each word a sort of whip-lash weight.

"Shall a guest of mine suffer in my house?"

One of the women piped up with a complaint against me. I had trodden on her foot and crushed her against a door-jamb.

"Would he had slain you!" she retorted. "She-dog! Take her away! I will punish her afterward! Who stuck pins into him? Speak, or I will punish all of you!"

None owned up, but three or four of them who had not been able to come near enough to do me any damage betrayed the others, so she ordered all except four of them out of the room to await punishment at her convenience. And then she proceeded to apologize to me with such royal grace and apparent sincerity that I wondered whom she suspected of overhearing her. Wondering, my eyes wandering, I noticed the woman veiled in black. She was an elderly looking female, rather crouched up in her gorgeous shawl as if troubled with rheumatism, and neither her hands nor her feet were visible, both being hidden in the folds of the long *sari*.

The next instant Yasmini flew into a passion because the Mahatma and I were kept standing. The Mahatma was not standing, as a matter of fact; he had already squatted on the floor beside me. The women brought us stools, but the Mahatma refused his. Thinking I might be less conspicuous sitting than standing I sat down on my stool, whereat Yasmini began showering the women with abuse for not having supplied me with better garments. Considering the long swim, the dusty ride on an elephant, and two fights with women during which they had been ripped nearly into rags, the clothes weren't half-bad!

So they brought me a silken robe that was woven all over with pictures of the Indian gods. And I sat feeling rather like a Roman, with that gorgeous toga wrapped around me; I might have been bearing Rome's ultimatum to the Amazons, supposing those bellicose ladies to have existed in Rome's day.

But it was presently made exceedingly clear to me that Yasmini and not I was deliverer of ultimatums. She had the whole future of the world doped out, and her golden voice proceeded to herald a few

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of the details in mellifluous Punjabi—which is at one and the same time an outrageous and alluring tongue, full of poetry and prurient references. She spoke seated, with a hand on either arm of the throne.

"PRINCESSES," she began, although doubtless some of them were not princesses, "this holy and benign Mahatma has been sentenced to die tonight, by those who resent his having trusted women with royal secrets. He is too proud to appeal for mercy; too indifferent to his own welfare to seek to avoid the unjust penalty. But there are others who are proud, and who are not indifferent!

"We women are too proud to let this Gray Mahatma die on our account! We women are not indifferent to our rights! The *Kali-Yug*, which was the age of the rule of men, is over! We women come into our own! And it shall not be said of us that we consented to the death of the man who gave us our first glimpse of the ancient mysteries!

"I say the Gray Mahatma shall not die tonight!"

That challenge rang to the roof, and the women fluttered and thrilled to it. I confess that it thrilled me, for I did not care to think of the Mahatma's death, having come rather to like the man. The only person in the hall who showed no trace of interest was the Mahatma himself, who squatted on the carpet close beside me as stolid and motionless as a bronze idol, with his yellow lion's eyes fixed on Yasmini straight ahead of him.

"These men, who think themselves omnipotent, who own the secret of the royal sciences," Yasmini went on, "are no less human than the rest of us. If I alone had learned the key to their secrets, they might have made an end of me, but there were others, and they did not know how many others! Now there are more; and not only women, but men! And not only men, but known men! Men who are known to the government! Men whom they dare not try to make away with!

"It is true that if they should destroy the Gray Mahatma none would inquire for him, for he left the world behind him long ago, and none knows his real name or the place he came from. But that is not so in the case of these other men, one of whom sits beside him now. Already Maharajah Jihanbihar has inquired by telegraph as to their names and their business here, and the Government agents will be here within a day or two. Those two white men must be accounted for. Let them, then, account to us for the Gray Mahatma's life!"

I glanced sideways at the Gray Mahatma. He seemed perfectly indifferent. He was not even interested in the prospect of reprieve. I think his thoughts were miles away, although his eyes stared straight ahead at Yasmini. But he was interested in something, and I received the impression that he was waiting for that something to happen. His attitude was almost that of a telegraphist listening for sounds that have a meaning for him, but none for the common herd. And all at once I saw him nod, and beckon with a crooked forefinger.

There was nobody in that hall whom he was beckoning to. He was not nodding to Yasmini. I saw then that his eyes, although they looked straight at her, were focused beyond her for infinity. And there came to mind that chamber in the solid rock below the Tirthankers' temple, in which the granite table stood on which whoever knew the secret could see anything, anywhere! I believe that I am as sane as you, who read this, and I swear that it seemed reasonable to me at that moment that the Gray Mahatma knew he was visible to watchers in that cavern, and that he was signaling to them to come and rescue him—from life, for the appointed death!

But Yasmini seemed not to have noticed any signaling, and if she did she certainly ignored it. Perhaps she believed that her hornet's nest of women could stand off any invasion or interference from without. At any rate, she went on unfolding her instructions to destiny with perfectly sublime assurance.

"It is only we women who can arouse India from the dream of the *Kali-Yug*. It is only in a free India that the Royal Sciences can ever be stripped of their mystery. India is chained at present by opinions. Therefore opinions must be burst or melted! Melting is easier! It is hearts that melt opinions! Let these men, therefore, take this Gray Mahatma with them to the United States where hearts are more inclined to hear the women's cause, and let them melt opinions there! Let them answer to us for the Mahatma's life, and to us for the work they do yonder!

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"And lest they feel that they have been imposed upon—that they are beggars sent to beg in behalf of beggars—let us pay them royally! Lo, there sits one of these men beside the Gray Mahatma. I invite you, royal women, to provide him with the wherewithal for that campaign to which we have appointed him and his friend!"

She herself set the example by throwing a purse at me—a leather wallet stuffed full of English banknotes, and the others had all evidently come prepared, for the room rained money for about two minutes! Purses fell on the Mahatma and on me in such profusion that surely Midas never felt more opulent—although the Mahatma took no notice of them even when one hit him in the face.

There were all kinds of purses, stuffed with all kinds of money, but mostly paper money; some, however, had gold in them, for I heard the gold jingle, and the darned things hurt you when they landed like a rock on some part of your defenseless anatomy. Take them on the whole, those women made straight shooting, but not even curiosity was strong enough to make me pick up one purse and count its contents.

I rose and bowed acknowledgment without intending to commit myself, and without touching any of the purses, which would have been instantly interpreted as signifying acceptance. But I sat down again pretty promptly, for I had no sooner got to my feet than the woman in black got up too, and throwing aside the embroidered *sari* disclosed none other than Athelstan King looking sore-eyed from lack of sleep and rather weak from all he had gone through, but humorously determined, nevertheless.

Yasmini laughed aloud. Evidently she was in the secret. But nobody else had known, as the flutter of excitement proved. I think most of the women were rather deliciously scandalized, although some of them were so imbued with ancient prejudices that they drew their own veils all the closer and seemed to be trying to hide behind one another. In fact, any one interested in discovering which were the progressives and which the reactionaries in that assembly could have made a good guess in that minute, although it might not have done him much good unless he had a good memory for the colors and patterns of saris. A woman veiled in the Indian fashion is not easy to identify.

But before they could make up their minds whether to resent or applaud the trick that King had played on them with Yasmini's obvious collaboration, King was well under way with a speech that held them spellbound. It would have held any audience spellbound by its sheer, stark manliness. It was straighter from the shoulder than Yasmini's eloquence, and left absolutely nothing to imagination. Blunt, honest downrightness, that was the key of it, and it took away the breath of all those women used to the devious necessities of purdah politics.

"My friend and I refuse," he said, and paused to let them understand that thoroughly. "He is American. I am English. Neither of us is qualified to interfere in the women's field. We acknowledge the compliment. We refuse to accept your money."

Yasmini, who prided herself on her instantly ready wit, was too astonished to retort or to try to stop him. It was clear at a glance that she and King had had some sort of conference while the Mahatma and I were locked up together, and she had evidently expected King to fall in line and accept the trust imposed on him. Even now she seemed to think that he might be coming at concession in his own way, for her face had a look of expectancy. But King had nothing in his bag of surprizes except disillusion.

"You see," he went on, "we can no longer be compelled. We might be killed, but that would bring prompt punishment. Maharajah Jihanbihar has already started inquiries about us, by telegraph, which as you know goes swiftly. We or else our slayers will have to be produced alive presently. So we refuse to accept orders or money from any one. But as for the Mahatma—we accord him our protection. There is only one power we recognize as able to impose death penalties. We repudiate all usurpation of that power. If the Mahatma thinks he will be safer in the United States, my friend and I will see that he gets there, at our expense."

"It was in my mind," he went on, "to drive a hard bargain with the Mahatma. I was going to offer him protection in return for knowledge. But it is not fair to drive bargains with a man so closely beset

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as he is. Therefore I offer him protection without terms."

With that he tossed the black *sari* aside and strode down the narrow carpet to where the Mahatma sat beside me, giving Yasmini a mere nod of courtesy as he turned his back on her. And until King reached us, the Mahatma squatted there beckoning with one crooked forefinger, like a man trying to coax a snake out of its hole. King stood there smiling and looked down into his eyes, which suddenly lost their look of staring into infinity. He recognized King, and actually smiled.

"Well spoken!" he said rather patronizingly. "You are brave and honest. Your Government is helpless, but you and your friend shall live because of that offer you just made to me."

Yasmini was collecting eyes behind King's back, and it needed no expert to know that a hurricane was cooking; but King, who knew her temper well and must have been perfectly aware of danger, went on talking calmly to the Mahatma.

"You're reprieved too, my friend."

The Mahatma shook his head.

"Your government is powerless. Listen!"

At the moment I thought he intended us to listen to Yasmini, who was giving orders to about a dozen women, who had entered the hall through a door behind the throne. But as I tried to catch the purport of her orders I heard another sound that, however distant, is as perfectly unmistakable as the boom of a bell, for instance, or any other that conveys its instant message to the mind. If you have ever heard the roar of a mob, never mind what mob, or where, or which language it roared in, you will never again mistake that sound for anything else.

"They have told the people," said the Mahatma. "Now the people will tear the palace down unless I am released. Thus I go free to my assignation."

We were not the only ones who recognized that tumult. Yasmini was almost the first to be aware of it; and a second after her ears had caught the sound, women came running in with word from Ismail that a mob was thundering at the gate demanding the Mahatma. A second after that the news had spread all through the hall, and although there was no panic there was perfectly unanimous decision what to do. The mob wanted the Mahatma. Let it have him! They clamored to have the Mahatma driven forth!

King turned and faced Yasmini again at last, and their eyes met down the length of that long carpet. He smiled, and she laughed back at him.

"Nevertheless," said the Mahatma, laying a hand on King's shoulder, and reaching for me with his other hand, "she is no more to be trusted than the lull of the typhoon. Come with me."

And with an arm about each of us he started to lead the way out through the maze of corridors and halls.

He was right. She was not to be trusted. She had laughed at King, but the laugh hid desperation, and before we reached the door of the audience hall at least a score of women pounced on King and me to drag us away from the Mahatma and make us prisoners again. And at that the Mahatma showed a new phase of his extraordinary character.

I was well weary by that time of being mauled by women, and in no mind whatever to be bound again without a fight. I had already hurled one woman back like a battering ram against a half-dozen others, and I was about to spring for a chair with which to defend the three of us, when the Mahatma seized my arm, and gave tongue in a resounding, strange, metallic voice such as I never heard before. It brought the whole surging assembly to rigid attention. It was a note of command, alarm, announcement, challenge, and it carried in its sharp reverberations something of the solemnity of an opening salvo of big guns. You could have heard a pin drop.

"I go. These two come with me. Shall I wait and let the mob come in to fetch me forth?"

But Yasmini had had time now in which to recover her self-possession, and she was in no mood to be out-generaled by any man whom she had once tricked so badly as to win his secrets from him. Her ringing laugh was an answering challenge, as she stood with one hand holding an arm of the throne in the attitude of royal arrogance.

"Good! Let the mob come! I, too, can manage mobs!"

Her voice was as arresting as his, although hers lacked the clamorous quality. There was no doubting her bravery, nor her conviction that she could deal with any horde that might come surging through the gates.

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But she was not the only woman in the room by more than ninety-nine, and certainly ninety-nine of them were not her servants, but invited guests whom she had coaxed from their purdah strongholds partly by the lure of curiosity and partly by skilful playing on their newborn aspirations.

Doubtless her own women knew her resourcefulness and they might have lined up behind her to resist the mob. But not those others! The *purdah-nashin** knew too well what the resulting reaction would be, if they should ever be defiled by such surging "untouchables" as clamored at the gate for a sight of their beloved Mahatma. To be as much as seen by those casteless folk within doors was such an outrage as never would be forgiven by husbands all too glad of an excuse for clamping tighter yet the bars of tyranny. Whatever Yasmini might have to say about it, those *purdah-nashin* were unanimous and instant. They knew their minds, and made their meaning clear.

There was a perfect scream of fear and indignation. It was like the clamor of a thousand angry parrots, although there was worse in it than the hideous anger of any birds. Humanity afraid outscandals, outshames anything.

Yasmini, who would no more have feared the same number of men than if they had been trained animals, knew well enough that she had to deal now with something as ruthless as herself, with all her determination but without her understanding. It was an education to see her face change, as she stood and eyed those women, first accepting the challenge, because of her own indomitable spirit, then realizing that they could not be browbeaten into bravery, as men often can be, but that they must be yielded to if they were not to stampede from under her hand. She stood there reading them as a two-gun man might read the posse that had summoned him to surrender; and she deliberately chose surrender, with all the future chances that entailed, rather than the certain, absolute defeat that was the alternative. But she carried a high hand even while surrendering.

"You are afraid, all you women?" she exclaimed with one of her golden laughs. "Well—who shall blame you? This is too much to ask of you so soon. We will let the Mahatma go and take his friends with him. You may go!" she said, nodding regally to us three.

But that was not enough for some of them. The she-bear with her cubs in Springtime is a mild creature compared to a woman whose ancient prejudices have been interfered with, and a typhoon is more reasonable. Half-a-dozen of them screamed that two of us were white men who had trespassed within the purdah, and that we should be killed.

"Come!" urged the Mahatma, tugging at King and me.

WE WENT out of that hall at a dead run with screams of "Kill them! Kill them! Kill them!" shrilling behind us. And it may be that Yasmini conceded that point too, or perhaps she was unable to prevent, for we heard swift footsteps following and I threw off that fifteen thousand dollar toga in order to be able to run more swiftly.

The Mahatma seemed to know that palace as a rat knows the runs among the tree-roots, and he took us down dark passages and stairs into the open with a speed that, if it did not baffle pursuit, at any rate made it easier for pursuers to pretend to lose us. Yasmini was no fool. She could concede whatever those panic-stricken *purdah-nashin* might demand, but she probably called the pursuit off nevertheless.

We emerged into the same courtyard, where the marble stairs descended to the pool containing one great alligator. And we hurried from court to court to the same cage where the panther pressed himself against the bars, simultaneously showing fangs at King and me, and begging to have his ears rubbed. The Mahatma opened the cage-door, again using no key that I could detect, although it was a padlock that he unfastened and shoved the brute to one side, holding him by the scruff of the neck while King and I made swift tracks for the door at the back of the cage.

But this time we did not go through the tunnel full of rats and cobras. There was another passage on the same level with the courtyard that led from dark chamber to chamber until we emerged at last through an opening in the wall behind the huge image of a god into the gloom of the Tirthankers' temple—not that part of it that we had visited before, but another section fronting on the street.

*Women who live in Zenanchs.

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And we could hear the crowd now very distinctly, egging one another on to commit the unforgivable offense and storm a woman's gates. They were shouting for the Gray Mahatma in chorus; it had grown into a chant already, and when a crowd once turns its collective yearnings into a single chant, it is only a matter of minutes before the gates go down, and blood flows, and all those outrages occur that none can account for afterward.

As long as men do their own thinking decency and self-restraint are uppermost, but once let what the leaders call a slogan usher in the crowd-psychology, and let the slogan turn into a chant, and the Gadarene swine become patterns of conduct that the wisest crowd in the world could improve itself by imitating.

"Think! Think for yourselves!" said the Gray Mahatma, as if he recognized the thoughts that were occurring to King and me.

Then, making a sign to us to stay where we were, he left us and strode out on to the temple porch, looking down on the street that was choked to the bursting point with men who sweated and slobbered as they swayed in time to the chant of "Mahatma! O Mahatma! Come to us, Mahatma!"

King and I could see them through the jambs of the double-folding temple door.

The Mahatma stood looking down at them for about a minute before they recognized him. One by one, then by sixes, then by dozens they grew aware of him; and as that happened they grew silent, until the whole street was more still than a forest. They held their breath, and let it out in sibilant whispers like the voice of a little wind moving among leaves; and he did not speak until they were almost aburst with expectation.

"Go home!" he said then sternly. "Am I your property that ye break gates to get me? Go home!"

And they obeyed him, in sixes, in dozens, and at last in one great stream.

CHAPTER XIV

"I'm going to learn their secret, or break my neck."

THE Gray Mahatma stood watching the crowd until the last sweating nondescript had obediently disappeared, and then returned into the temple to dismiss King and me.

"Come with us," King urged him; but he shook his head, looking more lionlike than ever, for in his yellow eyes now there was a blaze as of conquest.

He carried his head like a man who has looked fear in the face and laughed at it.

"I have my assignation to keep," he said quietly.

"You mean with death?" King asked him, and he nodded.

"Don't be too sure!"

King's retort was confident, and his smile was like the surgeon's who proposes to reassure his patient in advance of the operation. But the Mahatma's mind was set on the end appointed for him, and there was neither grief nor discontent in his voice as he answered.

"There is no such thing as being too sure."

"I shall use the telegraph, of course," King assured him. "If necessary to save your life I shall have you arrested."

The Mahatma smiled.

"Have you money?" he asked pleasantly.

"I shan't need money. I can send an official *tar.**"

"I meant for your own needs," said the Mahatma.

"I think I know where to borrow a few rupees," King answered. "They'll trust me for the railway tickets."

"Pardon me, my friend. It was my fault that your bag and clothes got separated from you. You had money in the bag. That shall be adjusted. Never mind how much money. Let us see how much is here."

That seemed a strange way of adjusting accounts, but there was logic in it nevertheless. There would be no use in offering us more than was available, and as for himself, he was naked except for the saffron smock. He had no purse, nor any way of hiding money on his person.

He opened his mouth wide and made a noise exactly like a bronze bell. Some sort of priest came running in answer to the summons and showed no surprize when given peremptory orders in a language of which I did not understand one word.

Within two minutes the priest was back again bearing a tray that was simply heaped with money, as if he had used the thing for a scoop to get the stuff out of a treasure chest. There was all kinds—gold, silver,

* Telegram.

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paper, copper, nickel—as if those strange people simply threw into a chest all that they received exactly as they received it.

King took a hundred-rupee note from the tray, and the Gray Mahatma waved the rest aside. The priest departed, and a moment later I heard the clash and chink of money falling on money; by the sound it fell quite a distance, as if the treasure chest were an open cellar.

"Now," said the Gray Mahatma, placing a hand on the shoulders of each of us. "Go, and forget. It is not yet time to teach the world our sciences. India is not yet ripe for freedom. I urged them to move too soon. Go, ye two, and tell none what ye have seen, for men will only call you fools and liars. Above all, never seek to learn the secrets, for that means death—and there are such vastly easier deaths! Good-bye."

He turned and was gone in a moment, stepping sidewise into the shadows. We could not find him again, although we hunted until the temple priests came and made it obvious that they would prefer our room to our company. They did not exactly threaten us, but refused to answer questions, and pointed at the open door, as if they thought that was what we were looking for.

SO WE sought the sunlight, which was as refreshing after the temple gloom as a cold bath after heat, and turned first of all in the direction of Mulji Singh's apothecary, hoping to find that Yasmini had lied, or had been mistaken about that bag.

But Mulji Singh, although fabulously glad to see us, had no bag nor anything to say about its disappearance. He would not admit that we had left it there.

"You have been where men go mad, *sahibs*," was all the comment he would make.

"Don't you understand that we'll protect you against these people?" King insisted.

For answer to that Mulji Singh hunted about among the shelves for a minute, and presently set down a little white paper package on a corner of the table.

"Do you recognize that, *sahib?*" he asked.

"Deadly aconite," said King, reading the label.

"Can you protect me against it?"

"You're safe if you let it alone," King answered unguardedly.

"That is a very wise answer, *sahib*," said Mulji Singh, and set the aconite back on the highest shelf in the darkest corner out of reach.

So, as we could get nothing more out of Mulji Singh except a tonic that he said would preserve us both from fever, we sought the telegraph office, making as straight for it as the winding streets allowed. The door was shut. With my ear to a hole in the shutters I could hear loud snores within. King picked up a stone and started to thunder on the door with it.

The ensuing din brought heads to every upper window, and rows of other heads, like trophies of a ghastly hunt, began to decorate the edges of the roofs. Several people shouted to us, but King went on hammering, and at last a sleepy telegraph babu, half-in and half-out of his black alpaca jacket, opened to us.

"The wire is broken," he said, and slammed the door in our faces.

King picked up the stone and beat another tattoo.

"How long has the wire been broken?" he demanded.

"Since morning."

"Who sent the last *tar?*"

"Maharajah Jihanbihar sahib."

"In full or in code?"

"In code."

He slammed the door again and bolted it, and whether or not he really fell asleep, within the minute he was giving us a perfect imitation of a hog snoring. What was more, the crowd began to take its cue from the babu, and a roof-tile broke at our feet as a gentle reminder that we had the town's permission to depart. Without caste-marks, and in those shabby, muddy, torn clothes, we were obviously undesirables.

So we made for the railroad station, where, since we had money, none could refuse to sell us third-class tickets. But, though we tried, we could not send a telegram from there either, although King took the station babu to one side and proved to him beyond argument that he knew the secret service signs. The babu was extremely sorry, but the wire was down. The trains were being run for the present on the old block system, one train waiting in a station until the next arrived, and so on.

So, although King sent a long telegram in code from a junction before we reached Lahore, nothing had been done about it by the time we had changed into Christian

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clothes at our hotel and called on the head of the Intelligence Department. And by then it was a day and a half since we had seen the Gray Mahatma.

The best part of another day was wasted in consulting and convincing men on whose knees the peace of India rested. They were naturally nervous about invading the sacred privacy of Hindu temples, and still more so of invading purdah and investigating Yasmini's doings in that nest of hers. There were men among them who took no stock in such tales as ours anyhow—hard and fast Scotch pragmatists, who doubted the sanity of any man who spoke seriously of anything that they themselves had not heard, seen, smelt, felt and tasted. Also there was one man who had been jealous of Athelstan King all his years in the service, and he jumped at the chance of obstructing him at last.

After we had told our story at least twenty times, more and more men being brought in to listen to it, who only served to increase incredulity and water down belief, King saw fit to fling his even temper to the winds and try what anger could accomplish. By that time there were eighteen of us, sitting around a mahogany table at midnight, and King brought his fist down with a crash that split the table and offended the dignity of more than one man.

"—— the lot of you!" he thundered. "I've been in the service twenty-one years and I've repeatedly brought back scores of wilder tales than this. But this is the first time that I've been disbelieved. I'm not in the service now. I don't care an official —— for one of you. So here's my ultimatum! You take this matter up—at once —or I take it up on my own account! For one thing I'll write a full account in all the papers of your refusal to investigate. Suit yourselves!"

They did not like it; but they liked his alternative less; and there were two or three men in the room, besides, who were secretly on King's side, but hardly cared to betray their opinions in the face of so much opposition. They did not care to seem too credulous. It was they who suggested with a half-humorous air of concession that no harm could be done by sending a committee of investigation to discover whether it were true that living men were held for experimental purposes beneath that Tirthanker temple; and one by one the rest yielded, somebody, however, imposing the ridiculous proviso that the Brahmin priests must be consulted first.

So, what with one thing and another, and one delay and another, and considering that the wire had been repaired and no less than thirty Brahmin priests were in the secret, the outcome was scarcely surprizing.

TEN of us, including four policemen, called on the Maharajah Jihanbihar five full days after King and I had last seen the Mahatma; and after we had wasted half a morning in pleasantries and jokes about stealing a ride on his elephant, we rode in the Maharajah's two-horse landaus to the Tirthanker temple, where a priest, who looked blankly amazed, consented at once to be our guide through the sacred caverns.

But he said they were no longer sacred. He assured us they had not been used at all for centuries. And with a final word of caution against cobras he led the way, swinging a lantern with no more suggestion of anything unusual than if he had been our servant seeing us home on a dark night.

He even offered to take us through the cobra tunnel, but an acting deputy high commissioner turned on a flashlight and showed those goose-neck heads all bobbing in the dark, and that put an end to all talk of that venture, although the priest was cross-examined as to his willingness to go down there, and said he was certainly willing, and everybody voted that "deucid remarkable," but "didn't believe the beggar" nevertheless.

He showed us the "Pool of Terrors," filled with sacred alligators that he assured us were fed on goats provided by the superstitious townsfolk. He said that they were so tame that they would not attack a man, and offered to prove it by walking in. Since that entailed no risk to the committee they permitted him to do it, and he walked alone across the causeway that had given King and me such trouble a few nights before. Far from attacking him, the alligators turned their backs and swam away.

The committee waxed scornful and made numbers of jokes about King and me of a sort that a man doesn't listen to meekly as a rule. So I urged the committee to try the same trick, and they all refused. Then a rather bright notion occurred to me, and I

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stepped in myself, treading gingerly along the underwater causeway. And I was hardly in the water before the brutes all turned and came hurrying back—which took a little of the steam out of that committee of investigation. They became less free with their opinions.

So we all walked around the alligator pool by a passage that the priest showed us, and one by one we entered all the caves in which King and I had seen the fakirs and the victims undergoing torture.

The caves were the same, except that they were cleaner, and the ashes had all been washed away. There was nobody in them; not one soul, nor even a sign to betray that any one had been there for a thousand years.

There were the same cells surrounding the cavern in which the old fellow had sat reading from a roll of manuscript; but the cells were absolutely empty. I suggestd taking flashlight photographs and finger-print impressions of the doors and walls. But nobody had any magnesium, and the policemen said the doors might have been scrubbed in any case, so what was the use. And the priest with the lantern sneered, and the others laughed with him, so that King and I were made to look foolish once more.

Then we all went up to the temple court-yard, and descended the stairs through the hole in the floor of the cupola-covered stone platform. And there stood the lingam on its altar at the foot of the stairs, and there were the doors just as we had left them, looking as if they had been pressed into the molten stone by an enormous thumb. I thought we were going to be able to prove something of our story at last.

But not so. The priest opened the first door by kicking on it with his toe, and one by one we filed along the narrow passage in pitch darkness that was broken only by the swinging lantern carried by the man in front and the occasional flashes of an electric torch. King, one pace ahead of me, swore to himself savagely all the way, and although I did not feel as keenly as he did about it, because it meant a lot less to me what the committee might think, I surely did sympathize with him.

If we had come sooner it was beyond belief that we should not have caught those experts at their business, or at any rate in process of removing the tools of their strange trade. There must have been some mechanism connected with their golden light, for instance, but we could discover neither light nor any trace of the means of making it. Naturally the committee refused to believe that there had ever been any.

The caverns were there, just as we had seen them, only without their contents. The granite table, on which we had seen Benares, London and New York, was gone. The boxes and rolls of manuscript had vanished from the cavern in which the little ex-fat man had changed lead into gold before our eyes. The pit in the center of the cavern in which the fire-walkers had performed, still held ashes, but the ashes were cold and had either been slaked with water, or else water had been admitted into the pit from below. At any rate, the pit was flooded, and nobody wanted the job of wading into it to look for apparatus. So there may have been paraphernalia hidden under those ashes for aught that I know. It was a perfectly ridiculous investigation; its findings were not worth a moment's attention of any genuine scientist, although they were, of course, accepted unconditionally, to King's public shame. Subsequently, newspaper editors who believed implicitly, for instance, in vaccination, in the dismal science of Bright and Cobden, in dates as given in Genesis—who even believed, and boasted of believing that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, including vowels and punctuation, just as their fathers had believed in phlebotomy and hot irons, wrote glibly of the gullibility of the human mind, with King's name and mine in full-sized letters in the middle of the article.

About the only circumstance that the investigating committee could not make jokes about was the cleanliness of all the passages and chambers. There was no dust, no dirt anywhere. You could have eaten off the floor, and there was no way of explaining how the dust of ages had not accumulated, unless those caverns had been occupied and thoroughly cleaned within a short space of time.

The air down there was getting foul already. There was no trace of the ventilation that had been so obvious when King and I were there before. Nevertheless, no trace could be found of any ventilating shaft; and that was another puzzle—how to account for the cleanliness and lack of air combined, added to the fact that such air as there was was still too fresh to be centuries old.

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One fat fool on the committe wiped the sweat from the back of his neck in the lantern light and proposed at last that the committee should find that King and I had been the victims of delusion—perhaps of hypnotism. I asked him point blank what he knew about hypnotism. He tried to sidestep the question, but I pinned him down to it, and he had to confess that he knew nothing about it whatever; whereat I asked each member of the committee whether or not he could diagnose hypnotism, and they all had to plead ignorance. So nobody seconded that motion.

King had lapsed into a sort of speechless rage. He had so long been used to having his bare word accepted on any point whatever, having labored all his military years to just that end, craving that integrity of vision and perception that is so vastly more than honesty alone, that the blatant unbelief of these opinionative asses overwhelmed him for the moment.

There was not one man on the committee who had ever done anything more dangerous than shooting snipe, nor one who had seen anything more inexplicable than spots before his eyes after too much dinner. Yet they mocked King and me, in the sort of way that monkeys in the tree-tops mock a tiger. Compared to what I have seen and done, King's range might almost be called infinite; my evidence, therefore, was worth nothing except as corroborating his. Nevertheless, I alone knew more—had done and seen more, and was therefore better qualified to trust my own verdict—than all those "investigators" put together.

Their remarks were on a par with those the cave-men must have used on the Dordogne, when some one came from over the sky-line and told them that fire could be made by rubbing bits of wood together. They recalled to us what the Gray Mahatma had said about Galileo trying to make the Pope believe that the earth moved around the sun. The Pope threatened to burn Galileo for heresy; they only offered to pillory us with public ridicule; so the world has gone forward a little bit.

"Let's go," said somebody at last. "I've had enough of this. We're trespassing, as well as heaping indignity on estimable Hindus."

"Go!" retorted King. "I wish you would go and be —— to you! Leave Ramsden and me alone in here. There's a cavern we haven't seen yet. You've formed your opinions. Go and publish them; they'll interest your friends."

He produced a flashlight of his own and led the way along the passage, I following. The committee hesitated, and then one by one came after us, more anxious, I think, to complete the fiasco than to unearth facts.

But the door that King tried to open would not yield. It was the only door in all those caverns that had refused to swing open at the first touch, and this one was fastened so rigidly that it might have been one with the frame for all the movement our blows on it produced. Our guide swore he did not know the secret of it, and our letter of authority included no permission to break down doors or destroy property in any way at all.

It looked like an *impasse*, and the committee were all for the air and leaving that door unopened. King urged them to go and leave it—told them flatly that neither they nor the world would be any wiser for anything whatever that they might do—was as beastly rude, in fact, as he knew how to be; with the result that they set their minds on seeing it through, for fear lest we should find something after all that would serve for an argument against their criticism.

Neither King nor I were worried by the letter of the committee's orders, and I went to look for a rock to break the door down with. They objected, of course, and so did the priest, but I told them they might blame the violence on me, and furthermore suggested that if they supposed they were able to prevent me they might try. Whereat the priest did discover a way of opening the door, and that was the only action in the least resembling the occult that any of us saw that day.

There were so many shadows, and they so deep, that a knob or trigger of some kind might easily have been hidden in the darkness beyond our view; but the strange part was that there was no bolt to the door, nor any slot into which a bolt could slide. I believe the door was held shut by the pressure of the surrounding rock, and that the priest knew some way of releasing it.

WE ENTERED a bare cavern, which was apparently an exact cube of about forty feet. It was the only cavern in all that system of caverns whose walls, corners, roof and floor were all exactly

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smooth. It contained no furniture of any kind.

But exactly in the middle of the floor, with hands and feet pointing to the four corners of the cavern, was a grown man's skeleton, complete to the last tooth. King had brought a compass with him, and if that was reasonably accurate then the arms and legs of the skeleton were exactly oriented, north, south, east and west; there was an apparent inaccuracy of a little less than five degrees, which was no doubt attributable to the pocket instrument.

One of the committee members tried to pick a bone up, and it fell to pieces in his fingers. Another man touched a rib, and that broke brittlely. I picked up the broken piece of rib and held it in the rays of King's flash-light.

"You remember?" said King in an undertone to me. "You recall the Gray Mahatma's words? 'There will be nothing left for the alligators!' There's neither fat nor moisture in that bone. It's like chalk. See?"

He squeezed it in his fingers and it crumbled.

"Huh! This fellow has been dead for centuries," said somebody. "He can't have been a Hindu, or they'd have burned him. No use wondering who *he* was; there's nothing to identify him with—no hair, no clothing—nothing but dead bone."

"Nothing! Nothing whatever!" said the priest with a dry laugh, and began kicking the bones here and there all over the cavern. They crumbled as his foot struck them, and turned to dust as he trod on them—all except the teeth. As he kicked the skull across the floor the teeth scattered, but King and I picked up a few of them, and I have mine yet—two molars and two incisors belonging to a man, who to my mind was as much an honest martyr as any in Fox's book.

"Well, Mr. King," asked one of the committee in his choicest note of sarcasm, "have you any more marvels to exhibit, or shall we adjourn *sine die?*"

"Adjourn by all means," King advised him.

"We know it all, eh?"

"Truly, you know it all," King answered without a smile.

Then, speaking sidewise in an undertone to me:

"And you and I know nothing. That's a better place to start from, Ramsden. I don't know how you feel, but I'm going to track their science down until I'm dead or master of it. The very highest knowledge we've attained is ignorance compared to what those fellows showed us. I'm going to discover their secret or break my neck!"

RATTLESNAKES—UNLIMITED

by **Edwin L. Sabin**

HOW large does the rattlesnake grow? A Texan reports killing one in west Texas that measured eight feet and had twenty-four rattles and a button. The writer has seen a six-foot skin in southern California. But in the Winter of 1868-69, when the Kansas Volunteer Regiment joined General Sheridan's command, the roving soldiers discovered, in the Wichita Mountains, a den of rattlesnakes which tops the record.

After the soldiers had taken their souvenirs and had thrown a number of the reptiles into the creek and the brush, one hundred and fifty-eight were counted. Several, without their heads and tails, measured eight feet, and were six inches in diameter. The sum total of the inhabitants was estimated at two hundred. As usual, the Indians claimed that the den was a "medicine" den—an aged Arapaho chief had entered it, to die, and had turned into a monster diamond-back, the father of all the snakes in that country.

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NOSE

by John V. A. Weaver

I GOT sharp eyes, yeh? And my hands moves quick.
You got to be that way, if the sea is where
You live and work and hope to die. That's me.
And eyes and hands is fine; but listen here:
The thing that makes me what I am today
Is just this funny thing I call my nose.

You hardly ever hear a nose get credit
Except in tunes about vi'lets and roses,
Or mother bakin' pies, or leaves that's burnin';
But them is easy smells. The hard ones is
The kind that makes a difference in your life.

Now. . . . Put me back to where I'm a young kid,
Runnin' around the streets and raisin' hell.
But they's one place I just can't keep away from,
And that's the power-station for the cable.
Remember it? Corner of Clark and Ellum?
The big wheels poundin', "Rum-rum-rum!" and always
That same smell, like a knife; it's tar and oakum.
Wheels, and that stuffy, cuttin' oakum smell!

And further down, along the Clark Street Bridge,
The coffee, bein' roasted in the warehouse,
And the blue smoke that give your nose a treat.

And on South Water, where the fish was laid out,
Shiny with brine, and with that salty smell
Of places that I'd only saw in dreams.

And, last of all, the big old pumpin'-station,
With fresh steam and the oil all mixed together,
And, boy! the way I useta stand and sniff,
And sniff, and let my eye ride up and down,
Up—and down—and up—with that big piston—
Say, I had lots of treats since then, but never
No treats like them when I was little and young.

Until—well, one day fifteen years from then,
When I was sellin' shoes down in Noo York,
And hatin' it, and not knowin' why I did,
It happened I went to the docks, to see
A friend. A ship was tied up to the pier,
Unloadin' stuff. A breeze come up a-sudden,
And all to oncet I got a whoppin' whiff.
By Gee, there it was, all to oncet together:
Coffee, and fish, and salt, and steam, and oakum,
And the hot oil—all in one crazy snootful!
And there I was—a little kid again!

So then I knowed the only kinda work
That I was made for, or could love; you see?
I shipped the very next day for a stoker,
And they ain't but damn few ports in the whole world
That I ain't stuck this nose of mine into.

Eyes? And ears? And mouth? And hands? All right;
But what I got to say, hooray for nose!
Folley your nose, I says, folley your nose! . . . .

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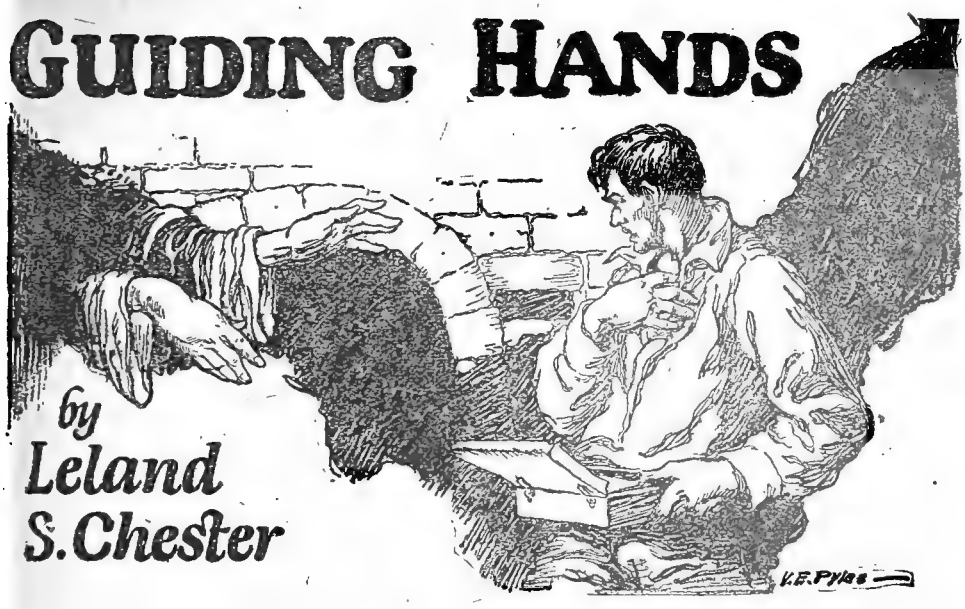
GUIDING HANDS



by Leland S. Chester

UNTIL the moment he saw Hennessy running along the embankment, firing into the brush at a fleeing prisoner, Bull Maddox had had no thought of escape. Now, however, with the attention of Hennessy, and the other two guards stationed about the rock quarry, centered upon the fugitive, he had a sudden and overwhelming desire for freedom. West of the quarry, and in the opposite direction from that taken by his fellow convict, lay a dense thicket of briar, haw-bush and sumac. In a flash Bull had scaled the bank and was running for it.

There was renewed shouting from behind; a bullet ripped through the brush on his left; another plowed up the earth at his feet. Bending low, he summoned all his speed and plunged into the thicket. The dense growth impeded his progress and compelled a dodging, zigzag course. This no doubt saved him from the salvo of lead that zipped and crackled through the brush on either side of him.

Presently the firing ceased; the shouting grew faint, died altogether. The chase had been called off temporarily. With two prisoners escaping in opposite directions and a score of others still in the quarry, or perhaps trying to escape, the guards would have their hands full. Until help could be summoned from the prison, half a mile away, there would be no further pursuit.

Bull ran on, making the best of the temporary advantage. It should give him a good lead. Night was coming on too. Barring accidental discovery, he was safe for the present. He kept on, running due west, shunning the thicker growths which interfered with his progress, yet keeping well under cover.

At the far side of the thicket a well-traveled road lay between him and some wooded hills. Automobiles passed up and down with disconcerting frequency. Concealing himself in a tangle of vines, he waited for a chance to cross. Now and then the road would clear; but each time he made a start a car would pop into view and drive him to cover again.

It was perhaps half an hour before his chance came. He had scarcely gained the opposite side when a car rounded a curve to the north, engine wide open, horn blaring a warning to other traffic. In the car were five men, and above the shoulders of all but the driver Bull caught the glint of rifle barrels. He hadn't been a moment too soon. He plunged headlong into a briar patch, and disregarding their pricks and scratches, squirmed down into the tangled mass and lay still.

The car halted almost opposite him and the men scrambled out. One of them, apparently the leader of the posse, began to give orders.

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"Hennessy, you stay here and watch the road. The rest of us will scatter out and beat the thicket. He's in there somewhere. He'll wait till dark to make a break, unless we rout him sooner. In that case, Hennessy, you can pot him while he's crossing."

Leaving Hennessy to guard the road, the four spread out and cautiously entered the thicket. Bull lay still, scarcely daring to breathe. The presence of Hennessy, he reflected, could mean but one thing—they had got the other fellow, poor devil! Otherwise Hennessy would not have been called from the chase.

As he lay there, peering through the briars at the broad back of the guard not twenty feet away, he reflected that it would be comparatively easy to spring out, clutch him from the rear, and choke the life out of him. But this method, even though it should prove successful, did not appeal to Bull. He was not given to violence; and besides, he liked the big, good-natured guard. Hennessy had been kind to him, and he knew for a fact that on one or two occasions the guard had spoken to the warden of his exemplary conduct.

Despite his rugged and suggestive appellation, Bull Maddox was not of a violent or domineering nature. Had he been he in all probability would have been a free man today. He could easily have brained the Greek confectioner whose store he had attempted to rob, with a convenient box opener, and made good his escape. Instead the swarthy vender had been left unimpaired to give the alarm, which resulted in his capture and identification a short time later. Two years of his five year sentence was already served, and until a scant hour ago he had been the most docile and obedient of prisoners. He wondered what Hennessy thought of him now.

Night came down, and the men returned to the car.

"He's not in there," declared the leader of the posse. "We've covered every inch of our end of it, and the boys from the other side have done the same. Still I can't believe he'd break from cover in daylight. Queer."

"He didn't come this way," assured Hennessy. "That's certain. I've kept an eye out both ways, and not a soul's crossed the road since we came. He must be in there somewhere."

"Well," decided the leader, "even if he is we can't do any more without lanterns. Might as well go in. The dogs will be here by midnight anyhow, and with any kind of luck we'll get him by morning."

Dogs! So they were going to trail him with dogs! That was a phase of the chase Bull had not thought of. He had never seen a bloodhound in action, but he had heard of many a luckless fugitive brought to bay by those uncanny brutes. He grew suddenly still with fear.

When the car bearing his pursuers had departed, he crept from his briar patch and scanned the road anxiously. The mention of dogs had unnerved him. He was undecided whether to chance the road for a mile or so, in the hope that passing cars would destroy his scent, or take to the hills as he had planned. While thus debating, a five-ton truck with a high canvas-covered load rumbled into view. As it passed he saw that there was an opening at the back where the canvas did not meet. This decided him. He slipped into the road, caught the tailgate and swung aboard.

The truck, he found, was loaded with household goods. With an effort he squeezed between a mattress and an overstuffed davenport and, comfortably settled for the time, he began to consider his next move.

Judging from the substantial way in which the load was arranged and secured, this was a long-distance haul. Probably an all-night run. It was now about 7:30, he judged, and according to the guard the dogs would arrive at midnight. It would require perhaps an hour to pick up his trail and follow it to where he had boarded the truck. Figuring on an all-night run, and barring delays, he should be a good fifty miles away by that time. Now if he only had some clothes——

Easing his body forward and groping about in the darkness, his hand at length came in contact with a suitcase. Luckily it was unlocked, and shifting back to his former position he began to explore it. His sense of touch made out a pair of trousers of some coarse material, a cloth cap; there were other garments too, which felt like a coat and some kind of shirt. Of course they may not fit, probably wouldn't; but anything, providing he could squeeze into them, would be better than his prison garb.

The truck rumbled on, making a good twelve to fifteen miles an hour. When he

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judged it was near one o'clock, and while they were passing through a dense wooded stretch, Bull gathered up the suitcase, dropped lightly to the road, and scurried into the protecting timber. Pushing his way through the tangle of vines and underbrush for an eighth of a mile, he crept beneath the leafy branches of a recently felled tree, where he remained, dozing fitfully, chilled to the bone, until daylight.

At dawn he dumped the contents of the suitcase upon the ground and pawed through them. A pair of coarse woollen trousers, well-worn, a coat of the same material and condition, a soiled black and white checked cap and a blue cotton shirt rewarded him. There were other articles of apparel also, such as cheap cotton handkerchiefs, some ragged underwear and several pairs of socks in various stages of decrepitude. Luck, plain old blind luck, had been with him.

Bull made a hasty change. The garments, he found, were a size too small, all but the cap, which was a full size too large for his bullet-shaped head. But such trifles didn't worry him. He was now clothed as a citizen, shabbily to be sure, but in this period of unemployment he would be taken for a tramp, another honest workman down on his luck. He still wore his prison shoes.

Retaining the handkerchiefs and an extra pair of socks, he replaced the remaining articles, along with his prison suit, weighted the suitcase with stones, and sank it in a deep hole of a near-by stream. This done, he set out cautiously through the woods, keeping a westward course.

FOR the next five days he kept to the woods and fields, living on half frozen apples which he clawed from beneath the matted grass in outlying orchards, and crisp, sweet turnips lifted from occasional patches along the way. He shunned scrupulously the highways, the towns and the numerous farm houses.

But the November nights were crisp, and he could have no fire. Hunger and cold were getting in their work. Like a starving wolf, he grew less cautious, the thought of capture became less terrifying. He had to have food, beg it or steal it, the method didn't matter, nor the consequences, so long as he stilled the gnawing in his vitals.

On the morning of the sixth day he threw precaution to the winds and, taking to the railroad, shambled disconsolately into a small country village. To his surprize no one seemed to notice him. He had gained the depot and was casting longing eyes upon the interior of the warm waiting-room, when a passenger train pulled in from the west. A traveling salesman, bearing two heavy grips, alighted, singled out Bull shivering in an angle of the station, and called to him.

"Hey, bo, want to make a piece of change?"

Bull eyed him furtively and nodded assent.

"All right," explained the salesman, "lug these grips to Parsons' store and I'll slip you a quarter."

Parson's store was about two blocks away, as blocks are measured. It was a typical small-town establishment, housing a promiscuous display of groceries and hardware, dry goods and clothing, tinware, chinaware, harness, every need of a rural clientele. It was also the post-office.

As Bull followed the salesman within, lugging the heavy grips, the warm smell of coffee and bacon, cheese, spices and other diffusive edibles, aroused anew the grappling in his stomach. He put down the grips and leaned weakly against the counter. The salesman fished out some small change and tossed him a two-bit piece.

Bull's eyes went from his quarter to a length of bologna sausage beneath a screened-in case. He motioned to Parsons.

"Gimme twenty cents' worth of this," he said, displaying his coin and indicating the sausage with a grimy finger, "and the rest in crackers."

While the salesman emptied his grips and arranged a heap of varicolored sweaters for the merchant's inspection, Bull slunk behind the glowing, pot-bellied stove and wolfed his purchase.

Save for Parsons and the loquacious salesman the store was empty; and for this Bull was thankful. So far he had scarcely been noticed. He was licking up the last of his cracker crumbs, preparatory to departure, when the door opened and a roughly clad man of about fifty, supporting an aged woman, came into the store. The woman was small and feeble and bent; and as she advanced Bull noticed that she moved with a cautious, dragging step as though feeling her way over the uneven floor.

Parsons looked up from his inspection of the sweaters and greeted her kindly.

"Hello, Mother," he said. "No; no letter from William today. But you come in

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tomorrow, or whenever you can. There'll be one some of these days. William's just careless, like most boys, I reckon."

The old woman turned and caught feebly at her escort. She seemed about to fall.

"No letter," she half-whispered. "No letter—and I was so—so sure. I dreamed last night that William wrote to me—that he was coming back. Oh, William, why don't you write to me? Why don't you come home?"

There was a world of pathos, of yearning, of wringing anguish in that trembling voice, an outpouring of love and thwarted hope. She turned away, and with lowered head and dragging step allowed the man to lead her from the room.

When the door had closed behind them the salesman turned to Parsons, and in a somewhat altered tone of voice, asked:

"Who is the old lady, Parsons? And who is this no-good William who doesn't write to her? The last time I called on you she was in here, and I remember you said practically the same thing to her. But she didn't seem to take it so hard then."

"No," returned Parsons, "she didn't used to make any fuss at all; but she's agin' mighty fast of late, and I guess that's got something to do with it. Afraid she'll pass out without seeing him again, I reckon.

"She's old Mother Rawlins," he went on; "and William is her only son that she hasn't seen for twenty-five years. It was this way: Her husband, Tobe Rawlins, had a mighty mean temper; couldn't control it at times. When William was fifteen Tobe ran him off—for practically nothing, I understand. Told the boy never to show his face back there again. And William hasn't.

"It just about killed his mother. She was wrapped up heart and soul in that boy. Tobe took it pretty hard too, after he'd got over his tantrum. He died three years later, and the doctor said there wasn't a thing wrong with him organically. It was just grief that killed him.

"Since Tobe's death Mother Rawlins has lived alone, except for Bud Akers—he's the man you saw with her—and his wife Dora, who occupy a tenant house on the place and sort of look after things. Every day or so she makes Bud drive her into town to see if there's a letter from William. Never for a minute in all that twenty-five years has she given up hope.

"She's a little off now, I reckon, what with old age and worry and lonesomeness. Almost blind too. Can't see a thing but just the bulk of folks. Everybody likes her and is sorry for her. We'd do almost anything for her if she'd let us. But she won't. Doesn't even invite folks in when they go to see her. At the age, I guess, when she likes to sit and dream."

"It's a shame," said the salesman, when Parsons had finished. "About the saddest thing in the world is a deserted mother."

And then with that liberality so prevalent among men of his calling he added:

"If there's anything I can do—a little money——"

"It isn't a question of money," interrupted the merchant. "We'd see to that right here if it was. But she's fairly well off, Mother is. Owns a hundred and sixty acres of good land two miles out on the Bentonville Road, and has money in the bank. Keeps quite a bit about the house too, I've heard. No, the only thing that'll do any good is that son of hers—and he's probably dead long ago."

Bull Maddox, forgotten by the two, crouched behind the stove and drank in the conversation, indifferently at first, then with growing interest, his ears strained to catch every word that was spoken. Neither Parsons nor the salesman saw him rise and slink quietly out.

Half a block away he accosted a young farmer just alighting from his buggy and inquired for the Bentonville Road. He got his direction and shambled on.

As yet Bull had no definite plan in mind. But the conversation back there in the store had aroused the germ of an idea which, if successfully carried out, held great promise.

The Bentonville Road led northward, through timbered hills and fertile valleys, sprinkled thickly with prosperous-looking, well-tended farms. When he judged that he had covered two miles, Bull halted and took careful survey of his surroundings. He was in a partly cleared valley, an eighth of a mile wide. No house was in sight, but a well-defined road swung off to the east, and after a moment's thought, he turned into it. Half a mile farther on he sighted a farm house and outbuildings, nestling in a thick grove of trees.

The house, an old-fashioned, two-story structure with a stone chimney at each end and a wide porch extending along the entire front, was gray and dismal with age. The

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barn was a huge, overshot affair, its Mansard roof sagged and rotting, splotches of faded red paint clinging to its walls. Other outbuildings were of conforming type. About the whole place was an atmosphere of decayed prosperity.

This must be it, thought Bull; and his plan now definitely worked out, he approached with a half-swagger and knocked. From within came the slow, dragging shuffle of cautious feet, a brief fumbling with the latch; then the door swung open a scant foot and Mother Rawlins, her dim-visioned eyes strained upon him, stood in the opening.

"Hello, Mother," said Bull readily. "I'm William."

He had anticipated a cautious and doubtful welcome, and with the knowledge gained at the store he was prepared to meet it. But he was wholly unprepared for the scene that followed. With a glad, choking cry which seemed to express all her years of pent-up longing, she was out upon the porch, her arms about him, laughing, crying, straining him to her in an uncontrollable hysteria of joy.

"My boy, my boy! My own little William," she kept saying over and over. "I knew you would come home. I knew God would send you back to mother."

Bull was abashed, ashamed for the moment of his impostrous rôle. He had not dreamed it could be like this. Since earliest recollection he had been kicked and cuffed, shunted from pillar to post, outcast, unwanted and unloved. Affection was a thing he had never known. He was taken aback, stunned, overwhelmed by this revelation of mother love.

Gently he disengaged her arms and allowed himself to be led into the house. Dazedly he took a chair before the crackling hearth and strove to regain his bearing. It seemed hours before the old woman could release him, take her hands from his person for a moment.

"I almost forgot," she said presently. "You're hungry, ain't you, William? Of course you are. You would be after walking all the way out here. I'll fix you something to eat right away."

A warm meal was something Bull wanted above all else just now, and he wanted it at the earliest possible moment. The mention of food restored him to his normal self, and thinking to expedite matters, he laid his hand on her arm and suggested:

"Sure I'm hungry. But maybe you'd better let me get it myself. You don't see very well any more, do you—Mother?"

"Not as well as I did when you were a little fellow, William. But I can still see—a little; and I know where everything is. You just sit here by the fire and rest. I'll have you a good dinner in no time."

Half an hour later Bull sat down to his best meal in years, if not the best he had ever eaten. Home-cured ham, fresh eggs, sweet, golden butter, salt-rising bread, and an array of canned fruits, preserves and jellies filled the old-fashioned dining-room table to its very edges. Bull ate ravenously, gorging his famished stomach until he felt that one more bite would prove fatal, then with a sigh of repletion he pushed his chair back from the table.

"Some meal," he said, turning to Mother Rawlins. "Just like old times, eh, Mother?"

"I remembered what you like," she returned happily. "Canned strawberries, quince jelly and watermelon preserves. I've always kept some in the house, ready for you. Mind how you used to beg for 'em between meals, William?"

Bull nodded, mumbling an affirmative. Hunger appeased, he was now planning his next move. He knew what that next move was to be, but he had not yet decided upon the method. Mother Rawlins kept money in the house, Parsons had said, and he wanted that money. But where should he look for it? Where was she most likely to keep it?

Late in the afternoon that question was answered for him, and without effort on his part. They were sitting by the fire, he and Mother Rawlins, and she was still fondling him, moving those gnarled but loving hands about his person, tracing his features, smoothing his bristling hair, striving by touch to envisage what failing sight had denied her. At length her exploring fingers came in contact with his frayed coat sleeve, found a rent in his trouser leg.

"My poor boy," she said compassionately. "You're all in rags. You've had a hard time, I'm afraid, William."

Up to this time Bull had said nothing of his past, and she had not questioned. Where he had been, what he done all those years, seemed not to matter. She was content to mother and fondle him; her boy had come back, and that was enough.

"Yes, Mother," said Bull glibly, feeling

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that an explanation of his long absence and poverty might help matters. "I have been sort of up against it. When I left here I went to sea—on a boat, you know. I was makin' money, lots of it, and was comin' home rich. Then the boat sank and I was left on an island, all by myself. They just found me a—a month ago, and I came straight home—just like I was, you know."

"You've suffered a-plenty, William," she said when he had finished, "but you won't have to suffer again. Your poor father was heartbroken when he realized what he had done, and he worked and saved to make it up to you, if you ever came back. And when he died I kept on workin' and savin', just for you. We've got plenty now, William; all you'll ever need—if you're careful."

She arose and with sure touch removed a brick from the old-fashioned fireplace, and from the orifice thus revealed drew out an oblong tin box. It was stuffed with green and yellow bills. Bull leaned forward tensely, his heart pounding at the sight of them. This was soft, soft indeed; just like taking candy from a baby. He could scarce keep his seat.

Mother Rawlins was fumbling in the box, parting the bills with her stiffened fingers. She drew out some of them.

"For clothes and things you'll need right away," she said, holding them out to him. "Bud'll take you to town to-morrow, or the next day, when you're rested, and you can buy what you want."

Bull's clublike fingers closed over the money and he counted it eagerly. Six tens! Sixty dollars!

"Soft is right," he told himself. "And to-night I get the rest of it. Oh, boy!"

Afternoon and evening wore on, and at 8:30 Bull was shown to a neat little room on the ground floor, and just off the living-room. It was simply furnished, containing an old-time four-poster bed, walnut bureau with white porcelain knobs, and a small table with a marble top and carved legs. Upon the walls was an array of juvenile pictures.

"Your old room, William," said Mother Rawlins, as her groping hands turned down the covers and shook up the pillows. "No one's slept in it since you went away. I've kept it fresh and clean, always ready for you."

When she was gone Bull removed his outer garments and lay down in his filthy underwear. No use to undress completely. He would be on the move shortly, as soon as the old lady was asleep; and the less time he wasted the better. He was scarcely settled in the deep featherbed when she came to his room again.

"Just to say good-night," she told him.

With gentle hands she straightened the covers and tucked them in about his shoulders.

"Mind, William, how I used to tuck you in when you were a little mite?" she said. "And how you used to make me sit and hold your hand till you went to sleep?"

Then she felt for his forehead, touched her lips to it, and went softly out.

Bull felt a cold sweat break out where those lips had touched him. A queer stabbing pain that was not physical shot through his body; a sudden constriction of the chest muscles threatened to smother him.

"——!" he said, breathing hard. "I wish she hadn't done that. It near got my goat."

He straightened resolutely and tried to put it from his thoughts.

AT MIDNIGHT he rose, dressed quietly, all but his shoes, and tiptoed from the room. Silence was everywhere. In the big living-room the dying embers in the open fireplace served as a guide. Noiselessly he approached, removed the brick and drew out the box. He opened it silently and curled his fingers about the contents. At the touch of that money his whole body stiffened, grew rigid. Again that stabbing pain, that tightening of the chest muscles. And then a vision of toil-worn hands rose before him; he felt their touch upon his person, their caress on his cheeks and bristling hair.

Slowly, reluctantly, trembling strangely from head to foot, he closed the box, pushed it back into the orifice and replaced the brick. He would have to wait a while, shake off this queer battling of conscience, or sentiment, or whatever it was. Foolish of course, but the thing had him, fast in its grip; he was powerless to resist it. In an hour or so, he would be all right.

And he thought he would be; but he wasn't. Later he tried it again, and still another time before morning; but always with the same result. He cursed himself for a fool, raved inwardly at this maudlin weakness. But it was no use. He couldn't

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get those mothering hands, those hands that had toiled for this money, out of his thoughts. He slunk back to bed and stayed there.

The next afternoon, at Mother's insistence, he allowed Bud to drive him to Parson's store, where he bought a complete outfit of cheap but serviceable clothing. Parsons remembered him; and while he was friendly enough and apparently glad to see Bull, he seemed a little too curious, looked him over too closely, asked too many questions. Bull, answering guardedly, hastened his purchases and got out.

That evening, back in the Rawlins home, he eyed the magic brick hungrily and resolved that there should be no foolishness tonight. He shouldn't have waited this long. By now his description would have been scattered broadcast to every official, petty and otherwise, in the state. Recognition was inevitable. The man Parsons, he believed, already suspected him. Well, let him suspect; they wouldn't find him here after to-night. Then, warmly clad and with plenty of money, they'd have a sweet time catching him.

But that same arresting, uncanny influence was again present when he removed the box a few hours later. Again those toil-worn hands, caressing him, crowding into his mental vision. And always when his hand came in contact with that sheaf of bills his desire for it left him. Beyond his reach he wanted it, within his grasp he couldn't take it. Queer, —— queer.

After the second attempt he climbed disgustedly into bed.

"It's no use," he told himself. "The —— stuff's charmed. I can't take it."

Days passed and he lingered at the Rawlins farm, unable to take the money, reluctant to leave without it. And as time went on a strange contentment possessed him. The fear of capture still haunted him, but it had now slunk into the background of his thoughts, unreal, like the lingering menace of a troubled dream. He was conscious too, in a vague sort of way, of a growing fondness for the dim-sighted little woman who mothered him so. He now thrilled to her caresses, even returned them awkwardly; and he found a keen pleasure in rendering little services which made her more comfortable or which seemed to please her.

As late Fall merged into Winter he began to evince an interest in other matters about the place. He took long rambles over the farm, inspecting fences, casting critical eye upon neglected orchard and weed-grown field; attempted crude repairs upon the outbuildings. He chopped wood, helped Bud with the chores, assisted Dora with the housework. Mother Rawlins was happy, happier than she had ever been, she told him, and Bull knew a smug satisfaction in the consciousness that he alone was responsible.

So engrossed was he in this new existence that he scarcely noticed her fast waning strength. The realization came suddenly one morning when she failed to leave her bed. He found her there, weak and listless, unable to rise. But as he entered her room her face brightened and she reached out an eager hand.

"It's you, ain't it, William?" she asked anxiously.

"Sure it is, Mother," said Bull, his voice strangely hoarse. "Why, what's wrong? Not sick, are you?"

"No, William," she returned softly. "I'm not sick. Only—only I'm going to leave you."

He took her worn old hand and stroked it gently. He swallowed hard at a lump that rose in his throat.

"No, you're not."

He strove to speak lightly, reassuringly—

"You're all right. Be feeling spry as a cricket in an hour or so."

Her head moved with a slow negative motion.

"It's the end, William. I can feel it coming. And I'm ready."

She was silent for a space, then went on:

"It's God's hand, William, and we mustn't oppose it. He's been good, and sent you back to me. That's all I ever asked of Him. He answered my prayer, and I'm ready now to bend to His will."

She relaxed quietly upon the pillow, and as Bull looked down upon the pale yet serene features and listened to her quick, sharp breathing, he knew that she spoke the truth. And suddenly a great relief welled up within him. With her passing would go that strange influence which had gripped him since entering this house. He could then take the money and, with an easy mind, be on his way. But the next instant the feeling had gone and a hot, choking shame replaced it. He decided not to plan for the future—just yet.

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During the next two days she grew steadily weaker, and on the morning of the third Bull knew that the end was near. There had been no pain, not the faintest trace of suffering; her life was going out as softly and gently as the fading sunset. Bull was constantly at her bedside, silent and motionless for the most part, awed by the tragic beauty of her passing. During periods of consciousness he strove to arouse in her a desire to live, a determination to battle the specter of encroaching death. But she only rolled her head weakly upon the pillow and smiled.

At noon she sank into a prolonged coma, from which he could not arouse her. After a time he rose and began to pace nervously up and down the room, his mind a jumble of conflicting emotions. What he should do when the end had come he could not decide. It was queer, this thing that had come over him. He had never felt this way before, and he could not understand it. And then suddenly his thoughts were interrupted by a loud, imperative knocking from the front of the house. A subtle sixth sense whispered to him the meaning of that summons; and yet he hesitated but a moment, then strode forward and flung open the door.

Hennessy, the prison guard, right hand in his coat pocket and thrust suggestively forward, stood without.

"Hello, Bull," he greeted, with a triumphant grin. "Nice little game you're playing here. Getting away with it, too, until Parsons recognized you and wrote the warden."

"Parsons!" Bull uttered the name involuntarily.

The guard nodded.

"Yes. Being post-master he gets a description of escaped convicts. He'd suspected all along that you were not William Rawlins, and when he got your description he notified the prison. The warden sent me down to look you over. No use to break for the rear," he warned, thrusting his pocketed hand forward, as Bull cast a furtive look toward the interior of the house.

"I'd get you in half a step. Besides, I brought the Mill Creek constable along. He's at the back door now."

Bull stepped out upon the porch, closing the door softly behind him.

"That's all right, Hennessy," he said in a low, calm voice. "I won't try to get away. Yes, it's a nice game I'm playin' here, the finest I ever played, and I'm glad I played it."

Hennessy caught the sincerity of tone, noted the softened features of his ex-charge. A new man stood before him, a clean, upstanding fellow who looked him squarely and fearlessly in the eye, wholly unlike the sullen, furtive creature he had known as 983 at the state's prison only a short time before. And yet he was not convinced. It might be merely a bluff. Criminals, as a rule, were clever actors.

"You've queered yourself, Bull," he said at length. "I'd been boosting you to the warden, and your name had already gone to the governor with recommendation for parole. You'd probably be a free man today if you'd kept up your record."

"Thanks, Hennessy," returned Bull quietly. "But I'm glad I got away. It would 'a' been the same old gang and the same old life—and prison again. It's different now. I can't explain it, Hennessy; but something's happened to me—in here"—he tapped his chest—"I didn't understand it till a minute ago. But I know now. When I do my stretch, Hennessy, I'm goin' straight. I'll have to. I can't help myself."

By this time the constable, hearing their voices, had rounded the house and joined them.

"It's him all right, constable," informed Hennessy; and then turning to Bull he ordered: "Well, get ready, Bull. We'll be moving along now."

Bull's face went suddenly pale, and he reached out a pleading hand to the guard.

"Not yet, Hennessy—not just now. Wait just a little while until—until— Come in, Hennessy, you and the constable. You'll understand better then."

Expecting some ruse, and ready for it, they followed him into the house. Through an open door leading from the living-room he pointed to a bed, upon which lay the still figure of an old woman.

"It won't be long," he told them huskily. "An hour maybe; not more than two. I'm nothing to her, of course; but she thinks I'm her son, and she's goin' out happy. She'll come to though, just before the end. They 'most always do, I'm told. She'll want me then. For God's sake, Hennessy, don't spoil it all—now."

For a moment the eyes of captor and

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captive met, and what he saw there made Hennessy drop his gaze and nod assent.

"All right, Bull," he said in a low tone. "In that case we can wait. But if it's a trick——"

Long, heavy minutes dragged by. Save for the ponderous ticking of the old Seth Thomas clock on the mantel, the labored breathing from the sick-room, and the muffled pad, pad of the prisoner's feet as he paced nervously up and down the carpet, there was no sound in the big, silent house. Presently Bull halted and, facing Hennessy, began to speak.

"You know, Hennessy, what I told you out there—about when I'd done my stretch? Well, I meant it. I'm goin' straight. But it's no credit to me. I want that understood. It's her—in there—that deserves the credit. I came here to steal—to get the money Parsons said she kept in the house. And then when I tried to take it I couldn't. I tried, Hennessy, tried time and again, and I couldn't take it.

"You see," he went on, "I never had a mother—that I remember of—and I didn't know what they meant to a man—or what a son meant to them. I didn't think any human could love another as she's loved me. I tell you, men, there's nothing like it this side of—of heaven—if there is a heaven. If there's any good in a man—just the least speck of good—it'll work up through all the bad and take hold of him."

There was a long silence; and then the constable, feeling, no doubt, that his office required a certain display of sagacity, spoke up:

"I wouldn't take much stock in that tale, Mr. Hennessy. Like as not he's just talkin' to gain time, or win sympathy. Make him show the money—if there is any."

Bull wheeled upon him almost savagely.

"I don't know you, constable," he snapped. "But I do know Hennessy. He's square. He'll see that it gets to the right place. I'll show you."

He strode to the fireplace, removed the brick and drew out the box. He threw back the lid and showed them the thick sheaf of green and yellow within.

"There it is!" he said triumphantly. "There's the only money I ever saw that I couldn't steal. It's a queer thing, but whenever I touched it I'd feel her hands about me and see 'em in my mind—them knotted old hands that had worked for this money—and I'd have to put it back. I'll see 'em all my life too, whenever I'm tempted, and I'll have to go straight. I couldn't——"

A call from the inner room interrupted him, a call, sharp, urgent, frightened, like the cry of a child in the dark:

"William! Where are you, William?"

Bull tossed the box to Hennessy and ran to the bedside.

"Here, mother! Here I am. This is William."

Through the open door the two officers saw Mother Rawlins, half-raised from her pillow, eyes wide and staring, hands groping frantically before her. They saw Bull slip a supporting arm tenderly beneath her shoulders, saw her hands find his cheeks and fondle them. Then her voice, only a whisper now, came to them:

"Good-by, William. You'll be a good boy—always—won't you—and—and come to me—up there?"

And they heard Bull, in a low, choking voice, reply—

"Yes, mother, I'll be a good boy—always—and—come to you."

Then he laid her gently, tenderly back upon the pillow. For a time he stood, head bowed, hands clasped before him, looking down upon her. At length he stooped and, lifting her hands, placed them reverently, one upon the other, across her breast. Then he turned, and with slow, dragging steps moved away from the bed.

At the door of the living-room he halted, squared his shoulders, threw his head back proudly, and looking them squarely in the eyes extended his wrists.

"All right, men," he announced; "I'm ready."

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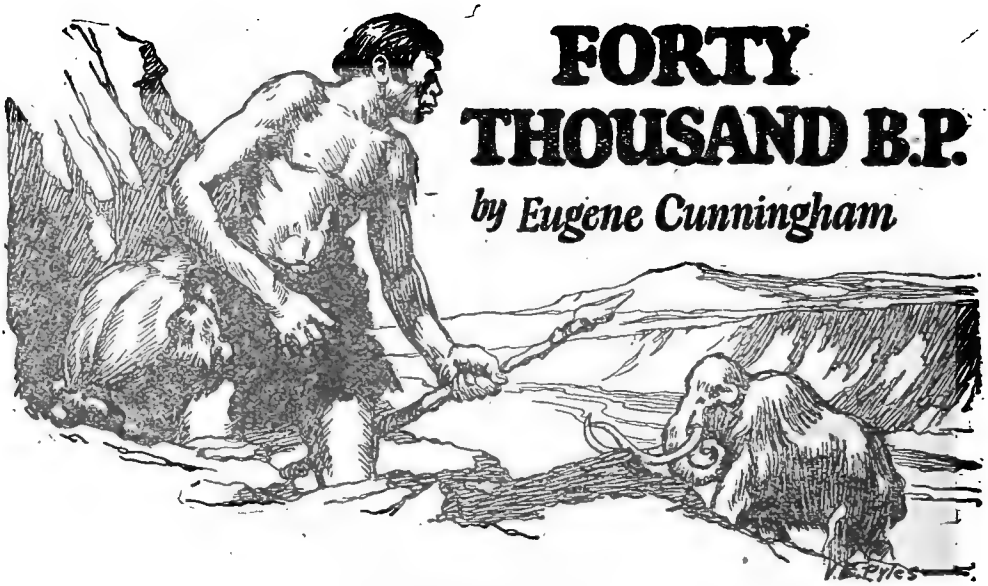

FORTY THOUSAND B.P.

by Eugene Cunningham

Author of "Hartley's Luck."

" 'Dowb,' the first of all his race,
Met the Mammoth face to face. . . ."
—KIPLING.

FOR a mile and more along the sluggish river the low bluff was scarred with cave-mouths. A few were natural rifts; the rest showed by marks of fire-hardened digging-spears the hand of man. The narrow beach between bluff-foot and water was littered with bones of beasts great and small, tossed out of the caves and accumulated since the last flood. Among the bones nosed a dozen or more of gaunt, gray creatures, snapping and snarling at each other; half-tamed wolves, these, whose parents had been captured as cubs; as yet of no use to man, but holding in themselves the seed of all modern dogs.

From the last cave to the east crawled Unk, a Neanderthal man of the caves. He rolled a great stone before his door, then stood slouchily erect in the brilliant mid-Pleistocene sunlight. He stretched brawny arms overhead to flex the muscles; when his hands dropped to his sides again they brushed his knee-caps. He yawned cavernously, then glanced up-stream to where, about smoke-wreathed cave-mouths, others of the cave-community were also ready to begin the day's tasks.

"Forty Thousand B. P." Copyright, 1922, Eugene Cunningham.

Here, along this narrow river of Western Europe, the forebears of Unk, and his fellows had found good hunting at an earlier time in the Pleistocene—the Glacial Period of the earth. In the mud of the stream were inexhaustible stores of great shellfish, easily dug; so the hairy men had settled in the caves that honeycombed the bluff and dug other dwellings as their numbers increased. Now nearly fifty families held the region, bound together by a slender community interest; not yet a tribe, but still capable of acting together at need, recognizing to a degree the leadership of the craftiest men.

Down-stream strode two red-brown, down-covered men, clad like Unk in single brief garments of untanned skin, belted with broad straps that held long flint knives. Neither stood as much as six feet tall, for Neanderthal man was inclined to stockiness. But their long arms were more mightily-muscled than have been those of any men since. Their chests were barrel-like, their thighs and calves thick and knotted. Low of forehead, short and wide of chin, there was in their faces a similarity to those of the man-like apes. But they held voluble conversation as they came in a dialect of harsh, short cluckings.

Unk, who topped either by almost a head and was more powerful of frame and muscle, still moved slightly back from the path at their approach. They cast at him only a

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single incurious glance as they gripped rude stone axes and moved toward their hunting. His position was an odd one in the rude community, very odd for that primitive day.

Possessed of a mighty body, he lacked the fierce aggressiveness that marked other men. There was back of the higher forehead, the cooler eyes, a brain not quite like the others'. It may have been that in him was the germ of change, of development, which should be transmitted to his descendants and quicken their wits, produce a higher type of man; that his being represented a tiny segment of the age-long process of evolution.

But it was an uncomfortable possession for Unk. Where other cave-men leaped in heedlessly at battle or hunt, giving no more than a brute's thought to consequences, Unk always found himself picturing the effect of what he did. He could envisage himself lying broken, dead, under the paws of cave-tiger, the huge feet of rhinoceros or mastodon. It worked in him and bred a hesitancy that was sometimes nearly fatal. The rest of the community, men, women and children, sensed the difference without understanding and rather scorned him.

He had gobbled the last meat in his cave; naturally he thought of hunting.

To east and west stretched the vast post-glacial forest, of oak and beech and tall coniferous trees. To the south, just across the river, began a wide plain, the limits of which no man of Unk's community had ever seen. To the north, many miles beyond the forest, was another plain. On these prairies grazed countless herds of the great "Irish" elk, of small horses that still carried vestiges of three extra toes above the single digit of each foot.

In the forests were mammoth and mastodon, giant ground sloth, slender wolverene, many small rodents; rhinoceros and such carnivorous beasts as the huge saber-toothed tiger, the great cave-bear, the hyenas and wolves, from all of which men scampered madly into the trees. On the marshes of the river-reaches were bustard and capercaillie and other game birds. It was a fat hunting-ground.

Unk turned aimlessly into the forest to the north of the river. As he moved to the westward he kept close behind the bluff, for here, because of man's disturbing presence, dangerous animals were not so plentiful. He went as silently as any other beast, the long, flat feet with their projecting heels touching lightly the deep primeval mold between the trees.

Presently, from a small glade ahead of him, came the sound of youthful shouts. A half-dozen boys were playing here, with always a watchful eye upon the forest around, from which so regularly in that day emerged some ravening beast anxious to attack and devour the puny creature Man.

Unk paused to watch the play. The boys were hurling tiny replicas of their fathers' hunting-spears at a lone tree in the center of the open space. Unk they discovered immediately, for even boyish eyes were alert from the constant watch for all-surrounding peril. He would have stopped awhile to show them how to hold the spears, how best to aim and hurl them, but one mischievous urchin, scarce as tall as the four-foot spear he wielded, was possessed of a brilliant thought. Unk he knew well and respected not a whit, for all his bulging muscles.

"It is Unk!" cried this youngster to his fellows. "He shall be a bear! He is ugly enough. Now, all together! This is how the hunters kill the bear!"

The others were fired by the beauty of the idea. The light shafts whistled toward Unk. Not with any other elder would they have dared the trick, for men of the caves were short-tempered and heavy of hand. But Unk was notoriously slow to wrath. As for Unk, he knew the futility of attempting chastisement; they would only dash shrieking to the caves, and he would soon find himself assailed by a swarm of deep-chested mothers, scarcely less brawny than their mates. So he took to his heels, unashamed, leaping high to escape the second cast of spears.

Pursued by the triumphant shouting of the boys, he headed north toward a windfall of oaks he had found a week before, where acorns lay thick upon the ground. It was in his mind to bring home a skinful of nuts. As he trotted silently along he thought of his damp little cave, the poorest choice along the river. Mentally he contrasted it to the roomy, dry cavern he had occupied with his father and his father's latest mate, until two months or so before, when his father had been a shade too slow in leaping to a tree and had been eaten by a cave-bear as penalty.

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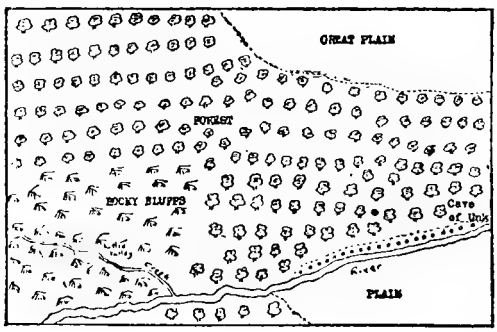

A week or so after his father's prosaic demise Unk had returned to the cave to learn that the woman had found herself another man; the newcomer had planted himself just inside the cave-door and, with swinging ax, had invited Unk to find another home. So Unk, as usual, had yielded to force and hunted out the unoccupied den he now held.

He stopped warily on the edge of the wind-carved open, peering sharply at the fallen trunks to see that no bear was also acorn-gathering. A faint sound tickled his flexible ears, and he crouched immediately in the shelter of a huge bole to listen intently, with hearing keen as any beast's. Presently the sound grew louder, revealed itself as pattering footsteps upon the oak leaves. Unk gripped the great ax more tightly and waited, ready for either fierce attack or frantic leap into the tree overhead, as seemed best. At last his eye caught a shadowy movement on the edge of the clearing to the left. Peering intently, Unk made out a slender, dark figure lurking beside a tree. Then into the open stepped a girl.

LIKE Unk, she was less squat of frame than others of the cave-people. There was about her a lithe grace that told of perfectly coordinated muscles. But her down-clad arms were long and the biceps a thing to marvel at; for only yesterday, comparatively, the ancestors of these folk had descended timidly from the tree-tops and commenced to walk erect upon the ground; even yet they could spring at need into the trees and swing for miles through the branches as nimbly as any apes.

Her nose was rather flat and wide of nostril; the lips were full and a shade too loose for handsomeness. But the small eyes were brighter, steadier than most; her whole expression held more of reflection.

She moved lightly to a heap of acorns and began to fill a baggy wolfskin, while Unk stared with changed expression. He knew her well; she was Saba, unmated daughter of old Long Leg, a mighty hunter. Many times since he had come to manhood Unk had watched her, feeling within him a queer, almost painful thrill that made him long to lay great hands upon her shoulders, to seize her and rush away to a cave of his own. More than once, moved by fierce, inexplicable emotion, he had thrown back his head and, roaring hoarsely as a bull-ape, leaped toward her.

But she was as fleet of foot as he; at these times either she had outdistanced him or grimmer suitors had sprung between. Before rivals, even in the semi-madness of the mating-mood, Unk had sullenly given way and earned her scorn.

He moved swiftly from the shelter of his tree, his deep-set eyes glowing. The tingling Autumn air seemed to set him afire, and here was opportunity better than he had ever had. He came so silently that he was nearly upon her before she whirled. For an instant she was poised for flight; then she recognized him, and into her face crept the same dimly scornful expression that marked all the community when they eyed Unk the Faint-Hearted.

"You come with me!" growled Unk, and for an instant she stared intently, analyzing his expression.

Then she shook her head with clucking laughter.

"Not with you!" she said. "If I were in your cave and another man wanted me, who would stop him from carrying me away? Unk? Not he!"

He snatched at her furiously, but she was alert. Others besides Unk had courted her in swift, knock-down fashion, and ladies of the Pleistocene, to survive, must be physically competent. Back she sprang gracefully, a good ten feet; laughed again. Unk snarled angrily as he rushed, but the girl, still clinging to her wolfskin of acorns, fled laughing down the path toward the caves. Unk bounded after, determined that this time there should be no escape.

Occasionally she glanced back at him as she ran, and each time her mocking laughter sent the hot blood to his brain in suffocating waves. She ran springily, effortlessly, her

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bare feet seeming hardly to touch the forest-floor. Unk pounded along grimly, twenty yards behind.

Suddenly Saba seemed to leap sidewise in very mid-air. Unk heard a fierce growl from the thicket, saw a brown bulk rear and strike flashingly. Instinctively he swerved also, skirting the spot where a cave bear fed upon a sloth, then came lightly back to the path, not much worried by the encounter. Saba had gained by this detour, but he lengthened his stride and again ran twenty yards behind.

A mile they raced, and two; still she tossed her taunting laughter back at him. Each time he snarled and hurled himself after her in a fierce spurt. Then into the path behind Unk crashed a huge body. The rhinoceros, twin-horned, ferocious as he was short-sighted, charged in their wake for a hundred yards. They ran then in deadly earnest, for to be treed by this ugly brute was always inconvenient, if not actually fatal. Fortunate for them was the beast's faulty vision; presently it gave over the chase, and they slackened pace a bit.

Unk was breathing somewhat thickly, but Saba seemed untouched by weariness. Gradually she drew away from him, until sixty, seventy yards were between. Unk forced himself on. But it was doomed to be a morning of interruptions; as Saba crossed the little glade where the boys had played, a bellow came from overhead. A man dropped from a tree and entered the chase, nearer by thirty yards to the girl than was Unk.

Both Unk and Saba recognized the savage Big Chin, son of old One Arm the chief, a stalwart warrior as tall and ropy-muscled as Unk and already a leader of the hunters. He was almost worthy of the prefix *Der* that signified a mighty one, for single-handed, with no weapon but his ax, he had once fought a cave-bear and put the brute to flight. Like Unk, he wanted Saba. Now, with no more than a contemptuous glance at Unk, he bounded after the girl. She laughed no more, but ran frantically, intent on making her father's cave. Unk followed to the edge of the forest, saw her evade Big Chin's final rush on the bluff-top, then halted as the disgruntled suitor turned savagely back to the forest.

Sullenly Unk went back to his hunting, for he had no mind to face this formidable rival. It was not exactly fear he felt; if Big Chin had ever cornered him Unk would have fought, and so mightily that Big Chin the redoubtable might have been the one left with shattered skull upon the ground. But Unk could never nerve himself to force the issue when there was an opening that let him avoid battle.

He trotted surlily along between the trees, keeping sharp watch to right and left. Presently he came to a place where huge grape-vines had curled and twisted about the trees over acres of forest. Unk had sometimes eaten grapes, though there were many other foods he fancied more. This late in the season but few vines bore fruit, but he found and yanked down a cluster, then squatted sulkily in a sunny spot. As he gobbled there came to his ears a humming drone that rose from a rocky knoll beyond his seat. Idly curious, he got up and climbed the little hillock.

SOME great beast had trampled through the vines here, tearing them down and crushing them, with their burden of purple fruit, in a broad, shallow depression of the rocky soil. Smashed grapes were thick in this natural basin, and the sun shone strong upon them. All about the place were insects, with a few birds, droning, buzzing, eating.

That quality in Unk that kept him wondering over the things he saw in life, that faint flickering of imagination that set him apart from his fellows, now led him to sprawl upon the ground and stare interestedly, his anger momentarily forgotten. Two tiny brown birds he watched particularly; he had seen their kind in the trees thousands of times; they were the shyest of the feathered creatures and man found it hard to approach within many feet.

But now they hopped boldly about the little basin, pecking greedily, squawking in a way he had never heard. One left its feeding presently and hopped fearlessly to within a foot of Unk's motionless body, hopped on and fluttered up to a low tree with discordant cries. The other followed with no more heed of the staring man than the first had shown.

Nimble-witted as he was in comparison to other men of his day, Unk was still lacking in the power to reason very deeply from premises found. But he was struck by the difference in the attitude of these birds to any of their kind he had ever seen before

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Dimly he realized that their lack of fear in his presence, the opposite of their usual manner, was caused by something. He was even capable of wondering if the difference came from what they had eaten. But—he had seen birds eat grapes before; he remembered that they had always flown at his approach.

He rolled over and picked up one of the broken grapes, popped it into a capacious mouth. There *was* a difference in the taste. He ate another, then a handful. The fruit was slightly sour, yet not unpleasantly so; the odd astringence tickled his palate, aroused an appetite. When he picked up a third bunch he exposed a pool of odorous crimson liquid caught in a hollow of the basin. Experimentally he dabbled his fingers in the pool, then licked them. The taste, he decided, was better than that of the grape itself. He lay flat and sucked the pool dry, moved over and found more such pools.

He drank until he could hold no more, then sat up lazily.

With the changed posture came consciousness of a wholly new sensation; objects about him owned a wavering quality he had never observed before. But wonder at this was swiftly submerged in realization of the marvelous exhilaration of brain he felt. Somehow he knew himself to be bigger than he had ever been, more powerful. He got to his feet and swayed slightly. A great boulder, weighing perhaps a half-ton, balanced on the knoll's edge. Unk stooped and hooked the fingers of one hand under it, straightened easily and sent the stone bounding down the hillside. As it crashed through the underbrush he sent up a volley of short, deep roars. He was Unk the Strong. Not even Big Chin might stand before him.

With thought of Big Chin inevitably came memory of Big Chin's interference in Unk's pursuit of Saba. Unk snarled deep in his throat. How dared any man come between him, Unk the Mighty, and the woman he wanted? He flexed long arms and watched the great biceps leap and play beneath the red-brown skin; he stiffened his arms above his head, and the huge back and shoulder muscles rippled up into knotty hillocks. He roared defiantly, a wordless challenge to the universe. He wanted to meet Big Chin! Never again should the chief's son come into a race with Unk the Strong One!

Down from the knoll he bounded, moving toward the river at a mad run. In that forest and that day men ordinarily moved with caution, for they went but a little way before they came upon the great carnivoræ. From beside the path, as Unk sped on heedlessly, came savage growling, deep, blood-chilling roars. But Unk mocked the beasts, bellowing and snarling as fiercely as any cave-bear or saber-toothed tiger. He was Unk the Mighty! He feared no brute that lived!

From a thicket before him glided a great yellow-brown beast, with slavering, bone-crunching jaws—great-grandfather, a thousand times removed, of modern hyenas. It was scarcely less formidable than the cave-bear and claimed of man the path.

Usually the cave-folk yielded swiftly and unquestioningly, but perhaps no hyena had ever met a cave-man with brain fermenting as was Unk's that day. Without pause Man leaped to meet Brute; an ax flashed up. Straight at the hyena's head it whizzed, clove through the skull. Without halting to recover his weapon Unk sprang over the quivering carcass and ran on.

He came out upon the edge of the bluff and halted for an instant, hoping to see Big Chin on the stretch of beach below. But as far as eye could reach no living thing moved upon the river bank. All the women and children who customarily worked there, cutting up meat, sewing skin garments, clam-digging or fishing, all were gone. Unk stared frowningly, then leaped down a narrow path and thrust his head into the nearest cave. It was empty and so was the next. But in the third cavern lay a crippled hunter, a man with leg broken from a tumble over a cliff. Of him Unk asked for the people.

"They have gone to hunt the mammoth," growled the injured man enviously. "The great herd which has been grazing in the broken land to the west had split at last. Four mammoth now feed near the line of bluffs above the little creek. By this time the hunters should have driven them over the cliff."

But Unk was gone. He knew that the hunters had brought word days before of a great herd—thirty or more of the huge beasts—grazing ten miles to north and west of the caves. He himself had scouted in that direction for a day, had seen the herd

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Then the mammoth had been too numerous to attack, but four—that was different. He ran swiftly and soon came upon the rear-guard of the villagers, women and children hurrying to the scene to be ready for the feast that must follow. Some shouted after Unk, but he went on without heeding.

After an hour he broke out of the forest into a region of rocky bluffs that climbed until a tall rampart of cliffs fenced in the valley of a narrow stream. More women and children waited on the forest-edge for word of the men's luck. He passed them silently and after a time came up to the hunters. They were gathered on the very summit of the cliffs, staring down into a natural amphitheater through which the creek flowed.

At the lower end of this valley the cliffs pinched together so that the stream covered all the bottom of the five-foot crevasse. The upper end of the valley was similarly formed, but here the creek leaped downward to its bed in a thirty-foot fall. So the valley formed a natural trap for any large animal.

Unk pushed through the buzzing throng on the cliff-top, elbowing his way without regard for any of the hunters who had jostled him all his life. Gaining the edge, he stared downward like the rest. He saw that the valley was perhaps fifty yards wide, thrice that long; that it could be gained easily only by following a steep ravine that made a natural runway ending on the valley-floor two hundred feet below. Near the creek, moving restlessly with ugly weaving head, was a gigantic bull-mammoth.

Unk rocked slightly on his heels as he stared. Finally he turned to the man who stood next him and with forceful elbow roused the hunter from contemplation of the trapped beast.

"Where are the other mammoth?" grunted Unk.

His neighbor regarded him curiously, for Unk's speech was strangely thick; about him clung a queer odor.

"We found four together," said the hunter at last. "So we formed a line behind them according to custom and with shouts and waving torches and ground-fires tried to stampede them toward the cliff. But the Long Tusks were more cunning than usual; three turned upon us and broke through our line. My brother was trampled to death with four other men. They lie out yonder now.

"This bull was leading. He ran toward the cliff here, so we thought he would leap over it. Der One Arm, the chief, said we should soon feast; Big Chin, his son, cried out mightily that the mammoth was the same as dead. But it was not so. The bull found the ravine and got down to the valley without harm. There he stands. We have blocked the ravine with stones so that he can not climb out, but no man sees a way to kill him. The valley is too big. We can not drop stones upon his ugly head; we dare not go down and attack him with our spears. Der One Arm, with Big Chin and Long Leg and other leaders, now make a plan."

Unk followed the hunter's jerked thumb and saw the group staring gloomily down at the bull. Unk moved toward them, swaying somewhat as he walked, his big mouth twisted in a grin, the strange lightness of brain still buoying him up. He rolled along on the very edge of the cliff, regardless alike of the yawning depth below, of the puzzled stares that followed him. Coming to where the leaders stood, he halted ten feet away and stared at Big Chin's back. For an instant he stood eyeing his enemy, then burst into deep, clucking laughter.

"How now, Big Chin!" jeered Unk. "The mammoth is below, so what do the mighty hunters upon the cliff? Will you wait, perhaps, until the bull grows old and feeble and falls over to die because too weak to eat? How will you kill Long Tusk? Speak!"

Furious because of futile speculation on this very point, the chief's son whirled, baring his teeth in a vicious snarl. Huge-muscled, demoniac of temper, in that moment he was an opponent any man of the community might have avoided. But Unk, watching from beneath drooped lids, only threw back his head and laughed again, louder than at first. Then Big Chin, with a chesty bellow of unleashed rage, hurled his ax in a swift underhand cast straight at the mocker. Unk caught the flash of ax-head in sun; just in time he leaped aside, still laughing. The uncouth missile hurtled through the very space he had just occupied and buried its edge in the green turf beyond.

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THEN Unk sprang forward. Save for the long flint knife thrust through his belt, he bore no arms. But in that moment, lifted out of his usual hesitancy of will by the magic liquid he had lapped, he was no more heedful of odds than the bull-ape he rather resembled. With no thought of Big Chin's spear, he had leaped. He landed lightly before Big Chin; one knotted fist flashed upward from knee-level. Hard as Roman *cestus*, impelled by those huge shoulder-muscles, it was a fearful weapon, hardly less deadly than a club.

Squarely on the point of the prominent feature that gave Big Chin his name the fist landed with resounding crack. Mighty as were his neck-tendons, they almost failed Big Chin. His head snapped back; his knees buckled; he crumpled to the grass and sprawled unconscious. Unk, with only one glance, turned to surly, domineering old Der One Arm, One Arm the Great, whose thick right arm had been torn off in battle with a cave-tiger. From the chief his eyes went to gaunt Long Leg, another mighty hunter, the father of the comely Saba.

"Oh, Der One Arm! One Arm the Great!" cried Unk. "What will the mighty chief do now? There is much grass in the valley. Not for many moons will the mammoth grow weak from hunger. The hunters have driven Long Tusk into a trap, but how will they kill him? Can the great leader One Arm make no plan? Truly, fools and children are the leaders of the Cave Folk! They dare only watch from the cliff, while below is much meat waiting for a brave man. Oh, fools, children!"

Lightly gripped in his left hand, Der One Arm poised the great spear which was his favorite weapon. Something near ten feet long, full two inches thick of shaft, with long, keen head of water-smoothed flint bound to it by knotted sinews, such a lance could be wielded by few men. Fewer still might hope to hurl it as the grizzled old chief now hurled it straight at Unk. Again the laughing one leaped aside; once more he broke into clucking laughter.

"Look at me, ye people of the caves!" he chanted, leaping high, whirling giddily before them. "I am Unk! Unk! Unk! Unk the Mighty! With one hand I lifted a great stone that weighed as much as ten men, tossed it as a boy flings a pebble. A hyena rushed at me in the forest, and I struck it dead with a single blow of my ax. For I am Unk! Unk! Unk! Unk the Great! I am Unk the Hurler of Stones!"

An unsuspected talent for acting possessed him. But he called it by no such name; he called it nothing, but only yielded to the impulse that rose in him. Before the gaping hunters and the fringe of women he spun and twisted up and down, pounding upon his broad chest.

Then he hobbled in the fashion of an old, feeble man, crying to the watchers that so were their leaders—Der One Arm, Big Chin, Long Leg. Next he straightened swiftly and expanded his chest, swung his arms overhead and stiffened them, shouted again that he was Unk! Unk! Unk! Unk the mightiest of men!

"I am Unk! I am greater than Saber-Tooth the Striped One! I am stronger than the Brown Terror, the Bear! Greater than anything on land or water is Unk! I will go down into the valley and kill this little mammoth-calf, this tiny beast, that makes the great Der One Arm as a toothless child rolling upon the leaves. For I am Unk! Unk! Unk! Unk the Mighty!"

Open-mouthed they watched him, gaping as at an utter stranger. It was perhaps the first out-and-out public speech, the first display of histrionics, in the history of the aged earth. Without understanding why, they were deeply thrilled. That singsong chant waked something in them; men began crooning gutturally to themselves, moving their feet restlessly, yet with a dawning rhythm. A little more of Unk's oratory and the dance, also, might have been born on that eventful day.

But Unk cut short his harangue with a roar that called forth bellowing answer from the watchers. Amid the chorus he swarmed over the cliff-edge. By rock projections and jutting roots he clambered down until he could drop to the grass of the valley-floor. Over by the creek the mammoth stood watching, great head weaving sinisterly from side to side, thick feet shuffling, trunk writhing in serpentine loops between the huge curved tusks. Straight toward the brute trotted Unk, while above hunters and women and children stared breathlessly.

Fifty feet from the ominously quiet bull Unk halted, then stooped swiftly and picked up a jagged ten-pound stone. This he hurled at the swaying head. It struck the tender trunk, and with a half-scream, half-bellow

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of fury, the mammoth charged. Unk knew better than to turn and fly before that rush. Though the mammoth, like the elephant of later day, could never gallop, that uncouth shuffle covered the ground at a tremendous rate. Agility was man's weapon, so Unk ran swiftly at right angles to the brute's course.

Halting and turning in the same motion, with a suddenness that plowed up the soil underfoot, the mammoth charged again and again, and Unk, laughing always, duplicated his maneuver. The bull stopped at last and stood sullenly watching his puny tormentor. Unk stared also, with the fumes of the grape slowly clearing from his brain. He was by no means normal, else he had surely taken to his heels. But his jubilant frenzy was gone; in its stead Unk had a nimbleness of mind that made for the quickest, shrewdest reasoning mankind had ever known until then.

Something effective must be done. So far, he had only shown his fearlessness in the face of a foe no less formidable than the terrible Striped One, Saber-Tooth the Cave-Tiger. But the real end desired was the death of this great beast that bulked far larger than the hugest elephant of modern times. Unk scratched his hairy chin and pondered, casting quick glances all about. Then his gaze focused on the cliff that hemmed in the valley to the south, a steep rampart of rocky soil a hundred and fifty feet high. Growing close against the cliff, with gnarled branches almost brushing it, was a stunted conifer, clean of limbs for fifteen feet of trunk. At this and the cliff Unk stared long and shrewdly.

Meanwhile the mammoth, that inexplicable, berserk rage of the elephant-folk sweeping red over its fierce brain, bellowed suddenly and charged like an express train. Unk, still pondering, mechanically dodged the rush. He ran coolly, with no flame of fear to heat his calm eyes. The mammoth's little eyes burned lambently red, but Unk, casting back over his shoulder thoughtful glances, was Man, by brain convolutions that permitted, even required, reasoning, master of all Creation.

Half-way to the cliff he fled on a zigzag course, until the bull again gave over pursuit, to stand shaking his great head. Then Unk tossed a stone and yelled scornfully. Stung by missile and tone, the beast charged more viciously than ever. So Unk led it on toward the spot he had chosen. Three times he hurled the maddening stone, yelled tauntingly.

When the bull halted for the third time Unk left him for the moment to his mad foamings and bellowings while he scampered lightly up the stunted tree. Safe in its upper branches, a good ten feet above the bull's head, he broke off a knotted branch and flung it.

The reply was a raging thunderbolt that struck the tree head-on and came near to uprooting it. But Unk had already left the perch, springing like an ape to the hollow he had seen in the cliff-face. From this retreat he watched calmly while the mammoth worried and butted the tree, curled a hawser-like trunk about it and yanked it bodily from the ground. When the trampled conifer was no more than match-wood Unk threw down handfuls of small stones, sang contemptuously to the bull, with an improvised chant that recounted his own greatness, the dull stupidity of Long Tusk.

"Into the valley fled Long Tusk,
Flying before the torches!
Upon the cliffs stood the hunters,
Fearing the wrath of Long Tusk!
Then came Unk the Mighty,
Unk the Hurler of Stones!
Pulled he the nose of Long Tusk,
Long Tusk the Stupid One!
Stones threw Unk the Mighty,
Unk the Unafraid!
Now he plays with Long Tusk,
Long Tusk the Mammoth!
Soon will Unk slay Long Tusk,
Give to the Cave Folk meat——"

Snatches of the rude pæan floated up to the awed concourse on the cliff, with accompaniment formed by the bellowings of the beast, the thunder of pounding feet that were trampling the sward of the valley to powder. The Cave People listened as to a manifestation of the Unknowable, as to the peal of thunder, huddled them more closely together.

The tiny hollow that housed Unk was chiseled by eroding rivulets which had curved around a great boulder embedded in the cliff and so eaten away the soil about the stone until it hung over the valley-floor with three-fourths of its bulk exposed. It had been the combination of tree and boulder which had attracted Unk's gaze. Many times he had watched such stones, in the season of the rains, as they were washed from hillsides and sent crashing to lower

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ground. It had not been too much for his brain to reason that what a man might do inadvertently—as he had done once or twice in his life—by leaning against such a poised boulder, a man might also do with cold intent.

He tossed down more stones and was rewarded almost too suddenly. The mammoth reared, foaming, upon its hind legs and shot a searching trunk into the very edge of the hollow. Unk flattened himself hastily against the inner cliff and struck at the exploring proboscis with a length of root snatched from the cliff. Then he turned the improvised club into a pick and dug furiously, loosening the earth about the boulder's face.

So, while the bull was still upright, rearing and gouging at the cliff with curved tusks, there was one deep cracking sound, and close upon three tons of boulder toppled, went crashing down upon that broad skull. Unk, blinded and deafened by the landslide from overhead, clung to the inner wall of his hollow, dimly sensing, through uproar and dust-fog, the passage of the boulder so close to his quivering back that projecting nibs sliced his skin from shoulder to waist.

Slowly the dust cleared away. Unk dared to move and found himself almost entombed by dirt. He scratched and dug until he could rise to a crouch and peer over the ledge. There sprawled the great hairy bulk below him, with head and shoulders almost hidden by boulder and accompanying earth. The mammoth was motionless, so Unk scrambled down and kicked the carcass exultantly. Then he threw back his head and roared his triumph.

FROM above the bellow was answered by a long, ululant quaver from near a hundred throats. It carried horror, amazement, awe, in one. Then a hunter, bolder than his fellows, came sliding down the ravine that had been the mammoth's runway, and streaked across the valley. Another came; then all the people scurried toward the prone beast. They halted a few feet away and stood gaping at the dusty, bleeding figure that strutted up and down before the carcass.

"I am Unk the Mighty One! I am Unk the Mammoth-Slayer! Mine, all mine, is the kill. But I give meat to all of you; only the tusks are mine alone! Let no man touch the tusks!"

Such a claim made at an ordinary hunt would have brought axes and spears to the front, provoked bloody battle, for no prize was so coveted by the Cave Men as the mammoth-tusk, good for picture-carving. But these folk had witnessed a spectacle for which they had been unprepared by anything in their past. Something of the awe which shakes men who look upon a battle of the gods still gripped them. Not one voice disputed Unk's right to the tusks.

They only fell humbly to work with flint knives, cutting the thick skin and rolling it back to expose the meat. The women and children gathered close about, staring alternately from prone Beast to victorious Man, with none of the jubilant cries that ordinarily marked such occasions.

Unk made no move to help the others. He stood proudly by the death-dealing boulder, his foot upon a tusk-tip that protruded from beneath the stone. Somewhat fearfully all eyed him; none could bear his eyes; their own dropped abashed. He glanced about him until he located a tall lank hunter, a grizzled, gnarled man who leaned negligently upon a huge sandstone ax. Behind old Long Leg was a woman's form, and from around the corded shoulder peered a woman's face, a comely, pleasing face, for all its soft, inch-long downy covering. In the dark eyes Unk saw an expression without precursor in his experience—perhaps in the experience of any man of his time.

A little of fear, much of admiration, even more of curious speculation; the eyes narrowed as they studied this amazing man who could not be analyzed, in entirety, by any standard or process possible to a woman's mind. As Unk regarded her steadily, all faded except admiration—and the dawning of a softer, more personal emotion.

Unk strode suddenly forward and some how found in his path the tall, stalwart form of Big Chin, who had once before come between him and Saba. But now Unk had only to snarl faintly, bare his teeth, and the tall son of the chief slunk hastily aside, as he might have retreated before the advance of tiger or bear.

Straight up to old Long Leg strode Unk and with one quick, sharp glance at the young man's face canny Long Leg also stood away. Remained only Saba, who poised on tiptoe as if ready for flight. He

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Unk's hand shot out and gripped her shoulder; without pretense of struggle she let herself be drawn against him, sheltered in the circle of his arm.

"Unk! Unk!" murmured the watching throng.

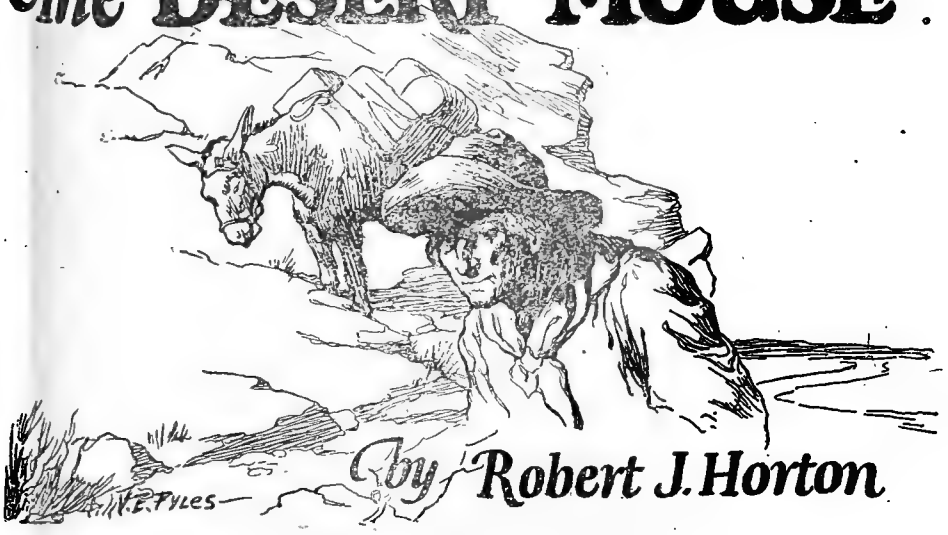
But Saba, after one darting glance upward at her new lord, lifted her voice to a pitch almost hysterical.

"*Der* Unk!" she shrilled. "He is Der Unk! Else he had never played with the mighty mammoth all men fear, played with Long Tusk as boys play with a cub wolverene!"

And the Cave Folk set the echoes vibrating in agreement.

"Der Unk!" they roared. "Truly, he is Der Unk!"

The DESERT MOUSE



By Robert J. Horton

Author of "The Lure," "Wool Hair an' the Law," etc.

THE crimson fires of the sunset were slowly dying in the western sky above the Chiquita Range. To northward, eastward and in the south the desert stretched for endless miles bathed in a hazy glow, with slender yucca palms, clumps of *la cholla*, *ocotilla* and giant cactus marking its distances. A soothing coolness came over the vast, barren land which had simmered through the day under a merciless sun.

"Peanuts" Ade stood in the doorway of his board-tent abode; board-tent because the floor and part of the sides were constructed of rough boards dragged from somewhere in the desert of hills, while the balance was of weathered canvas.

Because he was known as Peanuts Ade some might assume he was young. Peanuts was at least sixty years old—maybe more. The monicker had been bestowed upon him in his younger days when he had exhibited a pronounced fondness for peanuts whenever he came to town from the desert. Now the irony of fate chained him to the name despite his white hair, his stooped figure and the seams which traced intricate patterns on his face and neck and hands.

Peanuts held a stubby pipe between his toothless gums and gazed at the sunset. Every night, in town or wherever he might be, he turned thus to the westward to look upon the greatest and most beautiful of the desert's marvels.

He hunched his small, stooped figure forward and stared dreamily. The red in the skies had turned to gold, and it was, perhaps, the gold of sunrise and sunset which had held for him the desert's promise of the precious metal for which he sought—and had been seeking all his life. Silver claims he had had and sold, lead he had found, and copper; but it was the lure of gold that had led him countless miles from

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Death Valley and the Mojave to the Chiquita Range.

Once he had found it, but it had been an empty victory, for the dry placer had played out after yielding a scant dozen ounces or more. He still retained four ounces of the dust, and the gleaming attraction of those four ounces had cost him seven years of unavaling toil for every ounce.

When the twilight had drawn its purple curtain over the desert Peanuts looked down upon the little town which lay a mile to southward. He could see lights shining through the tents, and sounds of revelry came to his ears. His thin lips compressed in a sneer. An upstart town, this town of Silver. Scarcely a month old. Silver! Well, they could have it. He had sold one of the claims which had resulted in the rush.

His watery blue eyes turned wistfully toward the shadow of the Chiquita hills. If there was aught but silver in the desert below perhaps he would find what he sought in the bare, black range in the west.

He entered the tent and lighted a light. By its feeble rays he finished washing his supper dishes. Then, seated at the rude table, he drew from inside his shirt a small buckskin sack, untied its rawhide thong, and peered at the four ounces of yellow dust and grains within while his misty eyes glistened and his old heart pounded to the stimulus of the hope which burned in his brain.

Replacing the sack, he gazed for a few moments at the packs on the floor. Then he took down his battered hat, extinguished the light and went outside. He called a plaintive greeting to the pair of burros behind the tent.

"Prick up, you danged critters. If yo're goin' to light out you better be leavin' right smart, for we're goin' into the hills come mornin'."

The burros disregarded him, doubtless because they had been hearing his voice ever since they could remember.

Peanuts turned down toward the town. He walked slowly. He no longer felt any particular interest in towns. And the novelty of a new camp had long since been ancient history with him. There were a few things he needed or he very likely would not have gone down at all. However, when he had made his purchases he turned instinctively to the largest tent. It was from this place that the sounds of revelry issued. He hesitated and then shrunk back from the doorway as a roar of laughter floated out to him. Quiet followed, and finally Peanuts sidled in the door.

The place was lighted by lanterns equipped with reflectors. A bar had been constructed from packing cases which had been freighted in filled with supplies. Some tables had been improvised from the same material, and men crowded about both tables and bar. But card-playing and drinking had for the time apparently been suspended.

A man before the bar was reading from a small sheet of paper which he held in his hand. Peanuts Ade caught the words:

"So I suggest that you select a deputy from among your number, notify me and I'll appoint him. Yours truly, Sam Hall, sheriff."

Another burst of laughter sounded as the man ceased reading.

"Well, wha'd'ye know about that," roared a big man, who was standing beside the man who had been reading. "Ain't it —— the sheriff should be so busy down at Florence that he can't get up here to pick him out a deputy to ride herd on us? Lota' chance he's got to put the law inter a month-old camp that's eatin' raw silver."

It was the truth; for a new-born camp doesn't think about law until it has to—or is made to. And the new town of Silver was too excited over its prospects to give any heed to the call of authority.

The big man swept the faces about him with a sneer, and his gaze finally came to rest upon Peanuts Ade, who was striving to make himself as inconspicuous as possible in the shadow of the corner near the door.

"Well, bless my eyes if it ain't old Peanut Ade," roared the big man. "Here, bar-boy take my guns."

He made a pretense of passing the two big guns which he carried in holsters on his thighs over the bar.

"Now don't you get rough, Peanuts," he cried in mock terror while the others in the place shouted with respectful laughter. "Don't you get rough an' go to beatin' me up or anything."

Then for a moment the big man's eyes glowed dangerously as if in doubt; but a moment more and he laughed.

"Come up here to the bar an' lick a snort of cactus moonshine," he ordered

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"Hurry up or I'm liable to quit invitin'n' a start sprayin' a little lead to liven you up."

His hands dropped to the black butts of his guns.

Peanuts Ade advanced timidly. Naturally shy, retiring and taciturn, he hated the limelight. His modesty and the long years spent alone in the desert wastes had caused him in later years to shun anything except casual contact with his fellow men. He was voted harmless, which is not exactly a recommendation in the open places.

But in this case he knew it would be hopeless to try to evade the big man's invitation. He knew the big man would enjoy spraying bullets about his toes. He had seen the big man in the past and recognized instantly the swarthy features and evil, glinting eye of "Wolf" Pearson, better known as "The Gun Wolf" because of his proficiency with his weapons and his readiness to use them upon the slightest provocation.

He gulped the drink the bartender placed before him and shook under the impact of The Wolf's slap upon the back.

Then The Wolf held him off at arm's length and peered at him seriously.

The men in the place, or most of them, evidently were enjoying Ade's discomfiture. Also it was plain that they, too, harbored respect and fear of The Wolf. He was the dominant figure, prepared to enforce his prerogatives with any means at hand.

There was a dead silence now as he spoke.

"Say, boys, you all know the sheriff says he wants a deputy up here an' he ain't got time to come up an' pick one out. He leaves it up to us to elect one. Now this old desert rat, although he ain't hardly big enough an' vicious enough to be a rat—more of a mouse in fact—ought to make a fine deputy. An' he needs the money he'll get every time he arrests one of us."

Here The Wolf paused while he got his laugh. The idea of Peanuts arresting anybody was good. Why, the old man never had been known even to carry a gun!

"Now, boys," The Wolf continued, "I say we elect Peanuts Ade deputy sheriff of the risin' an' promisin' town of Silver by acclamation. What do you say?"

The roar of "ayes" which drowned The Wolf's last words caused Peanuts to shrink back against the bar.

DURING the scene which followed, the old prospector managed to slip toward the rear of the tent, where he was for the time being less noticeable. For an instant he wildly contemplated attempting to pull up a couple of the stakes holding down the tent wall and making a break for the outside. Escape by the entrance was impossible, for many men were crowded about the upper end of the bar where The Wolf had taken up his station. Cringing back into the shadows, he breathlessly watched the proceedings.

The man who had read the sheriff's letter now was writing laboriously while a score tried to look over his shoulders.

"There," he exclaimed finally with a long breath of relief, "I guess that'll fix it."

"Read it," commanded The Wolf.

The man read what he had written:

SHERIFF SAM HALL,
Florence, Ariz.

We got your letter and have elected Peanuts Ade to be our deputy. He is strong for law and order and never did anybody any harm in his life. Send your O. K. to us as soon as possible.

CITIZENS OF SILVER, ARIZ.

Cheers followed the reading of the communication to the sheriff. Somebody found an envelop, and the letter was duly sealed and stamped to be sent by the next day's truck to Emmett, the nearest town boasting a postoffice and a regular stageline.

"Where's Peanuts?" roared The Wolf.

Once more the old prospector was the center of an excited group.

"Put him up here," ordered The Wolf, pounding the top of the makeshift bar. "He ain't heavy enough to bust it in—put him up."

And with a sinking heart and shaking hands Peanuts was lifted to the top of the bar.

"Three cheers for our new deputy," shouted The Wolf, and the cheers were given with a will, although almost every man in the place was howling with laughter. It was welcome comedy.

Drinks were served, and Peanuts was compelled to reply to a toast.

"I appreciate—the honor—very much," he quavered.

After all, it was fun, of course. The boys were having a little fun—that was it. He would maybe be selfish if he objected. He stood upon the bar holding his glass in a trembling hand, wisps of white hair

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peeping from under the brim of his battered hat, blinking his watery blue eyes in the unaccustomed glare of the reflected lantern light.

"You won't be pinching the joint fer sellin' a little moonshine, will you?" some one yelled while the crowd roared.

"Better not serve him anything more; he might hold it for evidence," another advised amid the hilarity.

Peanuts smiled feebly. Oh for the soothing comfort of his own quiet abode with his friend the desert about him and the moon swinging in the high arch of the sky!

"C'mon now, deputy, give us a speech."

It was The Wolf who spoke.

Peanuts blinked at him. His tongue froze to the roof of his mouth. He tried in vain to swallow.

"C'mon, speak up," thundered the big man, glaring at the diminutive figure upon the bar.

Again Peanuts strove to moisten his tongue, to say something—anything.

"Oh, let him down," called a voice from the rear.

"Who said that?" snapped The Wolf, whirling and throwing a score of men away from him.

"Who said that—you?"

He faced a man who was standing at the rear of the crowd and who had remained silent during the whole pitiful show.

"I said it," replied the man, although his face paled. "You've—we've had our fun, why not let the old codger go; he's about all in."

"So you're dictatin' to this camp, are you?" sneered The Wolf. "Goin' to stop the deal before all the cards is out."

"I'm not dictating nor trying to stop any deals," returned the other, his face flushing. "I'm merely suggesting that we do the halfway square thing by that old man."

The Wolf's eyes blazed.

"What do you mean—square thing? Who're you to be talkin' about square things an' such to us? We bothered you any?"

The other's face now was white; his eyes narrowed.

"You know what I mean," he said evenly. "It ain't a grown man's part to make a fool of an old man like that."

The Wolf's face purpled with rage.

"Why you ——"

The sound of the slap echoed in the tent like the crack of a whip-lash.

The man staggered back, his hand dropping instinctively to his hip where an empty holster hung.

Then it snapped forward as The Wolf's gun roared.

The man crumpled upon the dirt floor as a little spiral of smoke drifted lazily upward.

In the excitement Peanuts Ade had scrambled down from the bar into the little space The Wolf had cleared. Now, as The Wolf and his victim held the attention of every one in the place, he slipped quietly to the door and out into the freshness of the cool, desert night.

DAWN found Deputy-Elect Peanuts Ade plodding behind his burros toward the Chiquita Range. The affair of the night before figured but occasionally in his thoughts. Once more he was engaged in the work he loved; treking weary miles across the desert inferno, upbraiding his pack-animals as a force of habit, dreaming of the strike he one day would make—why, he might make it on this very trip!

For more than a year he had prospected in this vicinity. Mostly he had confined his operations to the desert, but with the discovery of the silver deposits he had turned to the hills. He was a yellow-metal man, he told himself proudly.

It was noon and the sun was a molten ball of fire overhead when he reached the first blackened mounds of the lower slopes. Here he made a dry camp and ate a lunch, removing the packs and water bags from the burros to rest them.

After an hour he was again on his way

It was sunset when he reached Black Spring, so-called because of the black rock in which lay the cup of the spring. The spring was nearly full for it was only a few weeks after the rains. Peanuts had not been sure that he would find water in the spring and so had carried the water bags. He had long since learned to take no chance where water was concerned. Now he poured the water from the bags in the spring and speedily made his camp. The soft velvet canopy of the star-filled night had fallen over the mountains and desert when he finished with his supper. A cool breeze stirred among the lava hills and Peanuts leaned over his little fire puffing on his stubby pipe. The events of the night

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before were now vivid in his memory. The crowd of men, the glare of the lanterns, the brutal face of The Wolf, the cheers, the laughter, the letter to the sheriff.

Peanuts lifted his head with a jerk. It was fun, of course; and yet the men had complied with the sheriff's request and had elected him deputy—had elected him, Peanuts Ade, deputy sheriff for the boom town of Silver. It was all in fun, but it was also all regular.

At this very hour the notification might be in the hands of Sam Hall in Florence. Sam Hall didn't know him—Peanuts Ade—and he would think it all regular. And he would make the appointment as he had promised. Peanuts Ade knew Arizona sheriffs kept their word.

He began to speculate. If the letter had gone on the first truck out it must have reached Emmett, twenty-five miles southward, in time to be put on the noon stage for Florence. The stage traversed a route around the mountains southwest and north to Florence, which was west of the range. Fifty, sixty miles at most would cover the distance. Yes, sheriff Hall doubtless had received the letter and possibly had already made the appointment.

Peanuts smiled faintly. It was all great fun for the boys. He didn't begrudge them their fun. Still, it was all regular. But a deputy in a wild, new-born camp like Silver would be helpless. Likely the sheriff realized that and had for that reason acted as he had. When things became a little more settled the law would enter Silver. Men of the desert ordinarily tolerate the disregard for authority which almost of necessity attends the opening of a new camp. Later, and perhaps soon, it would be different.

Peanuts' thoughts again reverted to the scene of the night before. The dark face and bulky figure of The Wolf kept reappearing in his mind picture. Then a thin spiral of smoke drifted across his mental vision.

"It ain't a grown man's part to make a fool of an old man like that!"

He could almost hear the words, and see the stranger standing pale before the man-killing Wolf.

Peanuts stirred uneasily. The stranger had befriended him—and The Wolf had shot him down like a dog. Peanuts had noted that the stranger's holster was empty. Little did The Wolf care. Likely he had explained that he didn't know the man was unarmed. But The Wolf didn't have to explain. The men in the camp were palpably afraid of him; and he doubtless had friends among the floaters and gamblers who had drifted into the new diggings.

Peanut's pipe went out while he pondered over three things: the stranger's championing of his cause, the Wolf's gun-play, and his election as deputy sheriff.

Piecing together the three incidents brought always the same conclusion. It was the deputy's duty to arrest The Wolf and turn him over to the sheriff. The Wolf should have been jailed long ago, for that matter. Even as Peanuts wondered why he hadn't been, he knew. Men were afraid of The Wolf and The Wolf was clever. The mere mention of his name where he was known brought a significant silence. And yet——

"It ain't a grown man's part to make a fool of an old man like that!"

The words kept repeating themselves in Peanuts' brain. Maybe it hadn't been all just fun, after all.

Under his blankets Peanuts stared for hours at the starsplashed sky wherein the desert moon drifted like a splash of silver.

Before dawn he had started on the trail back to Silver. He left the burros at the spring, knowing they would not stray from the water. He made fast time since he had no pack-animals to drive and the trail for fully half the way led down hill. In the late afternoon he reached his tent shack above the camp.

He prepared a meal from the scanty stores he had left in the shack and then, sitting back from the doorway, he watched the sun drop behind the black hills and the twilight draw its veil over the desert.

He was very nervous, which was not his wont. He filled and re-filled his pipe, and at intervals muttered to himself.

With the arrival of night he made his way down to town. He kept as much as possible to the rear of the tents which clustered about the one short main street. When he reached the rear of the saloon he slipped around to the entrance.

The place was ablaze with light and the scene was similar to that which had greeted his eyes the night before except that the men were drinking and playing cards instead of listening to the reading of a letter.

Almost immediately he descried the burly

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form of The Wolf. He waited quietly by the door. He stopped the first man who approached the place.

"Will you tell The Wolf some one out here wants to see him?" he asked in a trembling voice. "Tell him it's important."

The man smiled when he recognized his accoster, but something in the prospector's agitated manner impressed him and he promised.

In a minute Wolf Pearson came blustering out the entrance. He stopped abruptly in astonishment when he saw Peanuts.

The old man put his fingers to his lips.

"I've got something to tell you that I don't want the others to know," he explained in a trembling whisper. "And—something to show you."

Wolf Pearson stared at him wonderingly and then frowned.

"Well, out with it, you old mummy," he growled. "What is it?"

"I—I can't tell you here," explained Peanuts. "Can—can you slip up to my place for a few minutes? You'll be interested," he added in a stronger voice.

"Up to your place!" sneered The Wolf. "Do you reckon I've got time to be chasin' aroun' with a crazy old fossil like you? I've a good notion to wring your neck!"

"Listen," said Peanuts, eagerly now. "You made me a deputy, and I owe you something. What I've got to say is for you alone and I've got something to show you up there—something all the men in the desert are lookin' for."

He had the temerity to grasp Wolf Pearson's arm lightly.

"Well I'll be——"

The Wolf paused. The prospector's excitement aroused his curiosity.

"Let me tell you something," he said gruffly. "If I go up there an' you're tryin' any game or pullin' any fool stunt I'll break you in two, crazy or not crazy. Do you realize that?"

"Yes," replied Peanuts quickly, though his eyes showed a flash of fear. "I must see you alone."

"Then, —— you, come along to the tent I'm sharing, there's nobody there."

Peanuts nodded his assent.

"What I said about any foolishness goes here as well as up there," threatened Wolf Pearson as he led the way to his tent.

Inside the tent Peanuts sank down weakly upon one of the four cots arranged on either side of a table upon which a lantern was burning dimly.

Wolf Pearson turned up the light.

"You promise—not to tell—anybody?"

Peanuts' words came in a thin whisper.

"If it's something only us should know I wouldn't be liable to peddle it aroun'," was the answer. "If it don't amount to anything you won't care whether I promised or not."

Peanuts fumbled with shaking hands within his shirt. Once he looked around as if to make sure they were alone. There was a queer look in his eyes and again Wolf Pearson stared at him in perplexity, and dropped his right hand to a gun until Peanuts withdrew his hand from inside his shirt. The hand held a small buckskin sack.

With fingers far from steady the old man untied the rawhide thong which bound it, leaned close to the table and held the sack open under the light.

Wolf Pearson's eyes bulged. He reached instinctively and hefted the sack; stirred its contents with a thick forefinger.

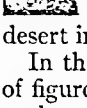
"Gold!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, gold, Wolf, for you an' me."

And now the old man's voice was stronger and his misty eyes gleamed as he watched the big man.

Wolf Pearson could not take his eyes from the yellow metal. Free gold! Dust and grains and diminutive nuggets!

He turned to see Peanuts Ade regarding him with a look of triumph.



BY THE first light of the new day a queer procession might have been seen wending its way across the desert in the direction of the Chiquita range.

In the lead plodded an old man, stooped of figure, small, white-haired, with face and neck and hands lined and seamed with the marks of age and reddened by months and years spent under the burning desert sun.

Following him, mounted on a large, rangy sorrel, was a big man, wide of shoulder with brute strength showing in every line of his body; dark of countenance, with thick lips and black eyes that glowed ominously and narrowed at frequent intervals as if by force of habit.

"Remember, Peanuts," called the big man, wiping the sweat from his face and forehead, "if you're leadin' me on any wild goose chase I'll break every bone in your body with my hands—with my hands

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understand. I wouldn't think of insultin' my guns by turnin' 'em on the likes of you."

Peanuts Ade halted. He looked up at the man on the horse through watery, blue eyes.

"You want to turn back, Wolf?"

"I didn't say anything about turning back," thundered Wolf Pearson. "An' I ain't makin' no threats. I'm just promisin' you something if you don't make good."

"An' I ain't promised you anything, Wolf," returned the old man in a plaintive voice. "I just told you that you made me deputy sheriff an' I owed you something, showed you the gold an' told you to follow me if you wanted to because I didn't want the whole camp to know. No use dividing with everybody at the start."

"That's right," agreed Wolf Pearson in softer tones. "Well, lead on." Again he wiped the sweat from his face.

Peanuts Ade was not showing the heat. He was accustomed to heat and dust and all the inconveniences and torture of the desert inferno. He plodded steadily on, apparently tireless.

Behind him, on the horse, Wolf Pearson smiled evilly to himself. Divide indeed! And for that matter why divide even with Peanuts Ade, once he had discovered where the old man had made his strike. For The Wolf was convinced that Peanuts had made a strike. There was the gold first of all to prove it. And there was Peanuts' manner; his evident excitement. And the old man apparently was grateful to The Wolf for having made him a deputy sheriff!

"The simple old fool," said Wolf Pearson to himself. "Thinks he amounts to something now. Going to let me in on his gold find because I got him elected a deputy."

The Wolf laughed aloud.

Peanuts turned and looked at him inquiringly.

"I was just thinkin' what a time I'll have in Los Angeles or 'Frisco with my share of the boodle," explained The Wolf.

Once more they continued on their way toward the hills.

Before sunset they arrived at Black Spring. Wolf Pearson nearly fell into the spring in his haste to get a drink. Peanuts Ade made sure the burros were there and built a fire to start supper before he turned to the water. The contents of both their canteens had been consumed by Pearson on the trail from Silver. The Wolf was a man of the towns and needed plenty of water. Peanuts required little—and that little at long intervals. The old prospector was of the very desert itself.

The Wolf ate ravenously. A man accustomed to loitering about card tables and living a comparatively easy existence in towns and camps will do this after a day of roughing it. Also he was tired. His natural aggressiveness and his speed with his guns gained him nothing in this new game which involved the hardships endured by the men he was in the habit of fleecing.

He turned in early under the blankets Peanuts furnished him. But before he went to sleep he placed his two big guns under him.

"I'm a light sleeper," he cautioned Peanuts Ade. "An' I hate to be disturbed."

Peanuts looked at the stars and thought, as the coals lost their lustre and The Wolf slept the sleep of exhaustion. He had no gun; had not been in the habit of carrying one for years. And even if it were possible to gain possession of one of The Wolf's weapons he knew he would not use it. He shuddered at the mere possibility of shooting a man, and he knew that if he drew down on The Wolf he would have to shoot or the big man would kill him in his tracks. Whatever might be said of Wolf Pearson, he was no coward. His fearlessness might be a lawless fearlessness, but it was fearlessness just the same.

In the morning Peanuts told The Wolf they would have to leave the horse and one of the burros at the spring. He explained that they would have to proceed afoot over the crest of the range, driving a burro laden with water bags and supplies.

The Wolf, rested, and with eyes burning with the lust for gold, readily agreed to this.

All morning they climbed steadily. Wolf Pearson stopped often to rest and soon began to complain of his feet. It was a kind of exercise in which he had indulged but little. They ate at noon on the summit of the range and then began the descent on the west side. Hour after hour they clambered down the steep, rocky slopes under the burning sun. Wolf Pearson drank long drafts of the precious water, and at frequent intervals called a halt to rest his tortured feet.

Peanuts Ade watched him quietly. The Wolf had ceased to ask questions and to threaten. He now was most concerned with

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his bodily discomfiture. He cursed continually while Peanuts listened silently.

To all queries as to the distance yet to be covered the old prospector answered—

"Tomorrow."

That night they made a dry camp far down the western side of the range. The Wolf ate silently and as soon as supper was over he went to sleep with his guns under him and Peanuts' blankets over him.

He awoke to find Peanuts Ade missing. He called loudly and after a short interval Peanuts appeared with a worried look upon his face.

"The burro's gone," he announced.

"Gone?" said The Wolf blankly. "Where?"

"Back over the range, probably," said Peanuts. "Well, we've got the water an' grub."

Wolf Pearson scowled at him while he went about the business of getting breakfast. The sun already was up and it seemed to The Wolf that Peanuts was ridiculously slow. When the meal was finished it was almost insufferably hot. Peanuts did not seem to notice the heat, but The Wolf was plainly in distress.

"We'll go on down," said Peanuts, "an' tomorrow we can start back."

This seemed to inspire the big man. On down—down to the gold, and then back. The Wolf expected to go back alone. The old man had been right when he had said there was no use dividing at the start. Wolf Pearson didn't know that there would be any sense in dividing at any time.

The old man staggered under the weight of a big water bag. The Wolf carried a canteen and a small pack of food. From time to time he drank copiously from the canteen. During the day he filled it twice from the water bag which Peanuts carried. That night he suddenly turned savagely upon the old prospector.

"You old rat," he shouted. "You show me that gold in the mornin' or by —— I'll fill you full of holes."

His guns leaped into his hands while the old man cowered back.

"Don't try any tricks with me," The Wolf growled as he replaced his weapons.

But Peanuts Ade reflected that the same quality of viciousness was not in the big man's threats this night.

While Wolf Pearson slept the old man sucked his pipe and looked out over the endless, moonlit stretch of desert to westward. He imagined he could detect a glimmer of light many miles away. At midnight he rose quietly and poured out half the water which remained in the water bag he had carried.

Again next day it was long after sun-up before they got started on the trail. This day Peanuts led a swifter pace and Wolf Pearson hobbled after him swearing fearfully and drinking recklessly.

It lacked an hour of noon when Peanuts Ade announced that but one more canteenful of water remained in the bag slung from his shoulders.

"You've drank too much," he accused while The Wolf swore.

"Hand over that bag," commanded Wolf Pearson.

Peanuts gave him the water and he dropped the bag at his feet.

The Wolf's eyes were burning with an evil light. He regarded the old man steadily and Peanuts paled before his gaze. For now there was murder in The Wolf's eyes. The big man's hands dropped slowly to his guns as he deliberated.

Then Peanuts began to speak hurriedly.

"Listen, Wolf, we're in a hard fix. I told you the gold was in this direction and it is. I found it over yonder."

He waved a hand toward the desert below.

"But we're runnin' short of water," he continued, "an' your feet are sort of goin' back on you. We've got to get out of here. There's only two ways. One way is back over the range, an' the other is down yonder."

The Wolf glanced up behind them and shuddered. He knew he never could climb the rocky trail to the top of the range and down the other side to Black Spring. His eyes glowed with suspicion as he again faced the old man. He suspected some kind of trick, but the main thing now was to get out of the hills and back to Silver. Then he could settle the score with Peanuts.

"How you goin' to get out without goin' over the range," he demanded.

"Aroun' by the southwest," said Peanuts. "An' there's water down there."

"Go ahead," the big man instructed, picking up the water bag.

Through the terrific heat of the afternoon Peanuts plodded on ahead while The Wolf

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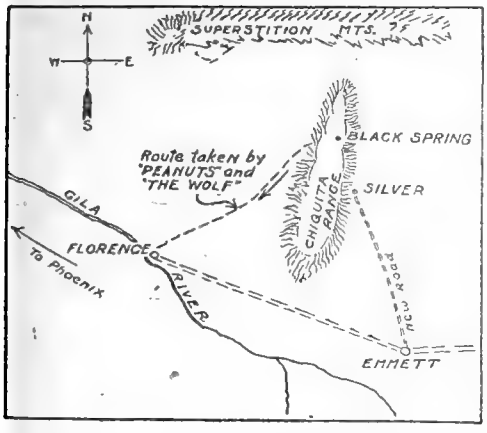

stumbled after him. The big man tried to nurse the water, but time after time yielded to the impulse to take a few sips. He poured the last of the precious liquid into his canteen without offering as much as a drop to Peanuts.

The old man looked back frequently, and now his look was no longer one of humility but of shrewd cunning. He watched stealthily and without complaint when the last of the water trickled down The Wolf's throat as they came out upon the near-level floor of the burning desert.

He struck off southwest.

At sundown The Wolf was raving by spells. His eyes were red; his face and hands blistered from the heat; he staggered like a drunken man.

With the coming of the twilight Peanuts suggested a rest and Wolf Pearson sank to the ground waving a gun. In another minute he was asleep. While the big man tossed and turned upon the ground Peanuts opened his shirt and drew forth a small canteen which he had carried at his side suspended from a cord about his neck. He took a long drink and poured half of the balance into The Wolf's canteen.

He pretended he was asleep when The Wolf roused about midnight. The big man reached instinctively for his canteen, tipped it to his lips and drank.

"Thought there must be some left," he muttered to himself.

Then he shook Peanuts viciously.

"Let's be goin' afore the sun gets up. You know where there's water?"

Peanuts nodded and got up.

This time he led the way straight west and The Wolf failed to notice it.

Daylight found them far out on the desert with The Wolf resting and groaning. His canteen again was empty. As the merciless sun swung up into the eastern sky Peanuts took the small canteen from within his shirt.

The Wolf's eyes darted fire as he commanded the old man to hand it over.

"Holdin' out on me, eh?"

The Wolf drank deeply, and the water put new life into him. There was no thought of food. The man's imagination fed his thoughts of water, water, water. He rose unsteadily and followed Peanuts out into the desert. His sense of direction now was gone. In two hours he finished the water. Three hours more and he again was raving with the heat and dust.

Peanuts plodded steadily on.

In wild delirium Wolf Pearson drew his guns and looked about him with bloodshot eyes. Peanuts dropped to the ground as a fusilade of shots sang over his head and in all directions.

Then he took the stumbling, raving giant by the arm and urged him westward across the desert.

SHERIFF SAM HALL sat at his desk and pondered. The city of Florence lay sweltering in the heat. A deputy entered the sheriff's office.

"Ade seems to be all right today," he said casually.

"I'll go up an' see him," said the sheriff, reaching for his hat.

In a room in the International Hotel, Peanuts Ade stared from the pillows of his bed at the sheriff.

"You've got him—safe?" he quavered.

"—— yes," replied the sheriff abruptly.

The official was thinking of the two figures which had came staggering in from the scorching desert—a big man, blubbering and raving, supported by a weazened old prospector who had been seized with delirium as soon as civilization had been reached.

"Sheriff, I wish you'd tell Wolf Pearson something for me," said the old man earnestly. "Remind him of the fact that I didn't tell him I had made a strike; that I just showed him the gold an' he followed me; that I said I found it in this direction—an' I did, although it was some miles farther on. An' say, sheriff, tell him he didn't make such a fool of me after all, even if he did shoot

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the man who took my part out there at Silver."

The Sheriff, who had heard the whole story, looked out the window.

"I've appointed you deputy at Silver, Peanuts," he said.

"Then cross me off the list because I've made my one and only arrest," replied Peanuts.

"Can't do that for awhile yet," said Sam Hall. "An' you've got some money coming."

"Never mind that," said Peanuts. "I'll come in an' get a grub-stake sometime I need it, maybe."

"Grubstake!" The sheriff snorted. "Listen, Ade. There's enough reward money on Wolf Pearson to grubstake you for the rest of your life in town in style!"

Peanuts Ade smiled faintly.

"I gave him enough water to keep him goin'," he whispered. "I told him I owed him something an' he got it—a cell."

"An' you danged near killed yourself, Peanuts," said the sheriff. "They're glad The Wolf is in where he belongs. Silver is goin' to welcome you with open arms. They is a bunch of 'em in today. Of course you're goin' back."

For reply Peanuts Ade looked out the window, across the vast expanse of simmering desert to where the blue outlines of the Chiquita range showed against the horizon.

"No," he answered; "I guess not."

PLAIN MAN

by Bill Adams

WHEN I write a letter, speaking of the great mysterious sea, and of the lovely sails of fleeting clippers flying all along her moon-lit waters, it hurts my soul; causing an ache to come for a sight of old companions whom in those days of long ago I knew so well.

I yearn for what is not, and never more may be.

One cries aloud for the dear dead beauties that are flown away, all singing murmurously down the happy roads of memory's lovely highways.

One seeks that which is not——

Yet one seeks that which is; for a once-born beauty never perishes.

Evil may perish; beauty never can. There can be no death to that which was born in the brain of suffering mortal man; for I hold and will forever hold that the spirit of man is eternally immortal. For creed, for doctrine, for dogma I care no whit. My soul has been split wide open in past days, rubbed with the smarting salt that the preachers rub so savagely into us. Today I harken to no preacher—for man may be preacher to himself—his soul his own—undefeated and unconquerable for all of time.

Truth and beauty are open and are free for all, and man was made for bravery—not for any whining, wet-eyed religion expounded from a pulpit in some dreary, darkened church.

Give me the sea—and the song of a cursing sailor.

Give me a camp—and the oath of a carefree soldier.

Give me the deeps of the coal-mine, and the blasphemous lips of my partner with the flashing pick.

Give me the mule-team and the teamster damning his leaders.

Give me MAN—plain man—man without hypocrisies and without shame.

Then and then alone I see a God before me, resplendent in His beauty—for I hold that God is one of us—plain men; knowing the stink of the cold sweat upon our laboring backs; knowing that within each of us is the bright spark that he planted there.

Well—I'm coming altogether too close to preaching; I beg your pardon; but when a man has been where I have been, and has seen the things which I have seen, hearing laughter and the bitterness of much weeping, he can but in common decency take off his battered hat once in a while to the skipper of humanity's ship—and need feel no shame, nor fear.

Sing, sailor, sing!

Any old thing goes in the forecastle as long as a man does his job as he sees it.

Gosh——!

Two black eyes, a cracked jaw and a sprained wrist don't mean that a man is necessarily a brute, do they?

"Hit 'im ag'in, you lubber—hit 'im ag'in!—*But hit him square.*"

I don't think it fair to hit the poor old horn-toed devil below the belt. *Toot-toot.*

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The SEA-HAWK
by Rafael Sabatini

A FIVE-PART STORY — PART III

Author of "The Hostage," "Captain Blood's Dilemma," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

SIR OLIVER TRESSILIAN found life very good to live. He had achieved honor and renown upon the Spanish Main; had been knighted by England's Virgin Queen, and his wooing of Mistress Rosamund Godolphin ran a smooth course.

But Peter, her brother, opposed the match, urged on thereto by Sir John Killigrew, the girl's guardian.

"I'll not have my sister wed a pirate, a vampire—glutted with the blood of dead men," said Master Peter.

And he struck Sir Oliver with his cane.

"I shall expect your friends and the length of your sword," said he.

"I do not fight with hucksters," replied Sir Oliver. At the departure of Master Peter, he at once hastened to the house of Sir John Killigrew.

Him, he challenged and, in a short passage of arms, wounded him—but not mortally. Then, getting him to Godolphin Court he told Rosamund of the duel; pleading his cause with a fiery ardor; begging her to discountenance the evil reports of her brother concerning him and promising to avoid the impetuous youth lest Master Peter provoke him to a duel. And she, for her part, promised not to listen to the tales of Master Peter and Sir John; would strive rather to win them over.

To some extent she succeeded in her endeavors. Sir John half-withdrew his opposition to the match. But not so Master Peter.

So it happened that—a week it was before Christmas—Sir Oliver met Peter at the village smithy.

"You dog!" Peter cried, and his lash came down and cut a long, red wheal across Sir Oliver's cheek.

Then with a thick laugh Master Peter rode away.

"Stay but a little while for me," roared Sir Oliver. "You'll ride no more my drunken fool."

He vaulted into the saddle and whirled away in furious pursuit.

He had not gone far, however, when, recalling his promise to Mistress Rosamund, he gave up the chase and returned home.

Presently Lionel, Sir Oliver's half-brother, entered the room. His face was deathly pale, his right hand pressed against his side and the fingers of it were all smeared with blood.

"Who has done this?" Sir Oliver cried.

"Peter Godolphin," came the answer. "I gave better than I took. He is as cold by now as the snow on which I left him. We fought in the dark, without witnesses. No one must know."

And so Sir Oliver, because of his great love for his half-brother, helped to cover up Lionel's crime; confident that no one had witnessed the duel and that the woman—the wanton—who had caused the quarrel, would remain silent for her own sake.

But next morning rumor had it that Sir Oliver had killed Master Peter and he, riding in haste to Godolphin Court, sought audience with Rosamund.

"You false deceiver," she cried when he protested his innocence. "There are those who heard you vow his death. From where he lay they found a trail of blood upon the snow that ran to your own door. Will you still lie?"

"God forgive you, Rosamund," said Sir Oliver.

Taking Master Blaine and the parson—witnesses of his quarrel with Master Peter—with him, Sir Oliver went to the justice and, removing his clothes, showed them his body free of recent wounds. The justice indited a document so testifying and added his seal as signature thereto.

And so the days passed. Sir Oliver shunned by all as a murderer; while Lionel was full of fears that Sir Oliver would clear himself of the charge, thus exposing his guilt.

In early March Master Jasper Leigh, a desperate adventurer of the sea, warned Lionel that Mistress Rosamund and Sir John Killigrew were planning to have Sir Oliver taken by the queen's officers.

This news Lionel carried to Sir Oliver.

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"What will you do?" he asked; his knees loosened by a sudden fear.

And Sir Oliver told of the document which would clear him and yet not implicate Lionel.

But Lionel, small of soul, envying his half-brother's wealth, himself in love with Rosamund, conspired with Master Leigh to trepan Sir Oliver away from England aboard the *Swallow*.

The plot was successful. Sir Oliver's apparent flight confirmed the belief that he had murdered Master Peter.

Now Master Leigh, having sailed his ship into the Bay of Biscay, bethought to make for himself more money. To that end he told his prisoner of Lionel's treachery and offered to take Sir Oliver home in token of certain payments.

Sir Oliver, embittered, eager to punish the traitor, agreed.

And so Master Jasper gave the order to "put about" but the *Swallow* had run in too close to the shore and was attacked by a Spanish ship.

Came a shot across the bows of the *Swallow*.

"'Tis a clear invitation to heave to," said Sir Oliver.

Came another shot, another, and another.

"——!" roared Leigh. "She's bilging!"

It was true. The *Swallow* had received her death blow and the Spaniard hove to intent on picking up slaves to man the galleys of the King of Spain.

SIR OLIVER and Jasper Leigh were among those of the crew rescued by the Spanish ship and carried to Lisbon. Each accepted Catholic baptism and so escaped the stake; but—had not Leigh attempted to escape? Had not Sir Oliver been at all times a bitter enemy of the Spanish? Had he not been a captain under Hawkins? And so both men were condemned to the galleys—Sir Oliver being dispatched to a vessel of fifty oars.

For six months Sir Oliver experienced the tortures of hell; chained stark naked to the bench; broiled and blistered by the southern sun, chilled by the night dews; unwashed; sparingly fed upon weeviled biscuit and tallowy rice. And when—after hours of toil, his senses reeling, his sight bleared, his whole body a straining ache—he would fain seek rest in the oblivion of unconsciousness, the sharp cut of the boatswain's whip would come to revive his flagging energies; would leave bleeding stripes upon his naked back.

Small wonder then that Sir Oliver came to curse all Christians.

"I renounce them all from this hour," he said, and growled an obscene oath as he heaved the great oar forward.

"Verily we are God's," said Yusuf-ben-Moktar, a Moslem slave. And that was the beginning of a friendship between the two men.

The ship was standing off the Balearic Isles when it was attacked by four Moslem galleys. The surprize was complete, and in the ensuing confusion Sir Oliver and Yusuf escaped from their chains and joined in the fight.

Shouting the Moslem cry: *"Din! Din! Allah, y'Allah!"* Sir Oliver fought with a berserk fury. In a little while all was over, and Sir Oliver found himself before the Moslem leader.

"By Allah! Was there ever such a fighter?" exclaimed the bearded one.

Now Yusuf was a person of great importance, and his first thought in this hour of victory was for Sir Oliver, who he made his lieutenant—after Sir Oliver had embraced the Moslem faith.

Step by step Sir Oliver won his way upward; becoming after Yusuf's death the commander in chief of Asad, the Basha. Because of his valor he was called Sakr-el-Bahr, the Hawk of the Sea.

And so he sailed the seas raiding the ships of Christendom. But he restored to liberty every English captive.

One, Pitt by name, he sent home with a letter to Mistress Rosamund, telling her of Lionel's treachery and of the document indited by Master Blaine.

Later he had news from Pitt. Rosamund had flung both letter and document into the fire—unread.

That night Sakr-el-Bahr wept long and loudly. But it was the last time. His heart became stone.

Five years passed, and again he received word from England. He had been presumed dead at law; Lionel had succeeded him; Lionel was betrothed to Mistress Rosamund.

With rage in his heart he set to sea and, capturing a Spanish ship on which Master Leigh was a slave, conceived a bold plan. Master Leigh was easily persuaded to turn Moslem and sailed the ship to England that Sakr-el-Bahr might come to an accounting with his half-brother.

Lionel he found feasting with Rosamund, and he carried them both off to his carack, then set sail for Algiers, his home port. On the way he attacked two Dutch ships and took their crews captive. He knew now that for a time he would be safe from the machinations of Fenzileh, the Basha's Italian wife, who was jealous of Sakr-el-Bahr's power.

That she had somewhat set the Basha against him Sakr-el-Bahr discovered immediately after his triumphant return. Asad chided him for risking the long journey to England and when Sakr-el-Bahr asked that the two English captives be given him, refused the request.

"These slaves of thine," said the Basha, "must be sent to the bagnio and sold on the morrow."

"Name the price and I will pay it," answered Sakr-el-Bahr.

"Deliver them to the bagnio," Asad repeated.

"It shall be done," said Sakr-el-Bahr. But he gave orders that Rosamund and Lionel should be kept apart from the others until the hour of sale.

CHAPTER XV

MOTHER AND SON

EARLY on the morrow—so early that scarce had the Shehad been recited—came Biskaine-el-Borak to the Basha. He had just landed from a galley which had come upon a Spanish fishing-boat, aboard of which there was a young Morisco, who was being conducted overseas to Algiers. The news of which the fellow was the bearer was of such urgency that for twenty hours without intermission the slaves had toiled at the oars of Biskaine's vessel—the *capitana* of his fleet—to bring her swiftly home.

The Morisco had a cousin—a New-Christian like himself, and like himself, it

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would appear, still a Moslem at heart—who was employed in the Spanish treasury at Malaga. This man had knowledge that a galley was fitting out for sea to convey to Naples the gold destined for the pay of the Spanish troops in garrison there. Through parsimony this treasure-galley was to be afforded no escort, but was under orders to hug the coast of Europe, where she should be safe from all piratical surprize. It was judged that she would be ready to put to sea in a week, and the Morisco had set out at once to bring word of it to his Algerine brethren that they might intercept and capture her.

Asad thanked the young Morisco for his news, bade him be housed and cared for, and promised him a handsome share of the plunder should the treasure-galley be captured. That done he sent for Sakr-el-Bahr, whilst Marzak, who had been present at the interview, went with the tale of it to his mother, and beheld her fling into a passion when he added that it was Sakr-el-Bahr had been summoned that he might be entrusted with this fresh expedition, thus proving that all her crafty innuendoes and insistent warnings had been so much wasted labor.

With Marzak following at her heels, she swept like a fury into the darkened room where Asad took his ease.

"What is this I hear, O my lord?" she cried, in tone and manner more the European shrew than the submissive Eastern slave. "Is Sakr-el-Bahr to go upon this expedition against the treasure-galley of Spain?"

Reclining on the divan he looked her up and down with a languid eye.

"Dost know of any better fitted to succeed?" quoth he.

"I know of one whom it is my lord's duty to prefer to that foreign adventurer. One who is entirely faithful and entirely to be trusted. One who does not attempt to retain for himself a portion of the booty garnered in the name of Islam."

"Bah!" said Asad. "Wilt thou talk forever of those two slaves? And who may be this paragon of thine?"

"Marzak," she answered fiercely, flinging out an arm to drag forward her son. "Is he to waste his youth here in softness and idleness? But yesternight that ribald mocked him with his lack of scars. Shall he take scars in the orchard of the Kasbah here? Is he to be content with those that come from the scratch of a bramble, or is he to learn to be a fighter and leader of the Children of the Faith that himself he may follow in the path his father trod?"

"Whether he so follows," said Asad, "is as the Sultan of Istambul, the Sublime Portal, shall decree. We are but his viceregents here."

"But shall the Grand Sultan appoint him to succeed thee if thou hast not equipped him so to do? I cry shame on thee, O father of Marzak, for that thou art lacking in due pride in thine own son."

"May Allah give me patience with thee! Have I not said that he is still over young."

"At his age thyself thou wert upon the seas, serving with the great Ochiali."

"At his age I was, by the favor of Allah, taller and stronger than is he. I cherish him too dearly to let him go forth and perchance be lost to me before his strength is full grown."

"Look at him," she commanded. "He is a man, Asad, and such a son as another might take pride in. Is it not time he girt a simitar about his waist and trod the poop of one of thy galleys?"

"Indeed, indeed, O my father!" begged Marzak himself.

"What?" barked the old Moor. "And is it so? And wouldst thou go forth then against the Spaniard? What knowledge hast thou that shall equip thee for such a task?"

"What can his knowledge be since his father has never been concerned to school him?" returned Fenzileh. "Dost thou sneer at shortcomings that are the natural fruits of thine own omissions?"

"I will be patient with thee," said Asad, showing every sign of losing patience. "I will ask thee only if in thy judgment he is in case to win a victory for Islam? Answer me straightly now."

"Straightly I answer thee that he is not. And, as straightly, I tell thee that it is full time he were. Thy duty is to let him go upon this expedition that he may learn the trade that lies before him."

Asad considered a moment. Then:

"Be it so," he answered slowly. "Shalt set forth, then, with Sakr-el-Bahr, my son."

"With Sakr-el-Bahr?" cried Fenzileh aghast.

"I could find him no better preceptor."

"Shall thy son go forth as the servant of another?"

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"As the pupil," Asad amended. "What else?"

"Were I a man, O fountain of my soul," said she, "and had I a son, none but myself should be his preceptor. I should so mould and fashion him that he should be another me. That, O my dear lord, is thy duty to Marzak. Entrust not his training to another, and to one whom despite thy love for him I can not trust. Go forth thyself upon this expedition with Marzak here for thy *kayia*."

Asad frowned.

"I grow too old," he said. "I have not been upon the seas these two years past. Who can say that I may not have lost the art of victory. No, no."

He shook his head, and his face grew overcast and softened by wistfulness.

"Sakr-el-Bahr commands this time, and if Marzak goes, he goes with him."

"My lord—" she began, then checked.

A Nubian had entered to announce that Sakr-el-Bahr was come and was awaiting the orders of his lord in the courtyard. Asad rose instantly and for all that Fenzileh, greatly daring as ever, would still have detained him, he shook her off impatiently, and went out.

She watched his departure with anger in those dark, lovely eyes of hers, an anger that went near to filming them in tears, and after he had passed out into the glaring sunshine beyond the door, a silence dwelt in the cool, darkened chamber—a silence disturbed only by distant trills of silvery laughter from the lesser women of the Basha's house. The sound jarred her taut nerves. She moved with an oath and beat her hands together. To answer her came a negress, lithe and muscular as a wrestler and naked to the waist; the slave-ring in her ear was of massive gold.

"Bid them make an end of that screeching," she snapped to vent some of her fierce petulance. "Tell them I will have the rods to them if they again disturb me."

The negress went out, and silence followed, for those other lesser ladies of the Basha's harem were more obedient to the commands of Fenzileh than to those of the Basha himself.

THEN she drew her son to the fretted lattice commanding the courtyard, a screen from behind which they could see and hear all that passed out yonder. Asad was speaking, informing Sakr-el-Bahr of what he had learned, and what there was to do.

"How soon canst thou put to sea again?" he ended.

"As soon as the service of Allah and thyself require," was the prompt answer.

"It is well, my son."

Asad laid a hand affectionately upon the corsair's shoulder, entirely conquered by this readiness.

"Best set out at sunrise tomorrow. Thou'lt need so long to make thee ready for the sea."

"Then by thy leave I go forthwith to give orders to prepare," replied Sakr-el-Bahr, for all that he was a little troubled in his mind by this need to depart again so soon.

"What galleys shalt thou take?"

"To capture one galley of Spain? My own galeasse, no more; she will be full equal to such an enterprise, and I shall be the better able, then, to lurk and take cover—a thing which might well prove impossible with a fleet."

"Aye—thou art wise in thy daring," Asad approved him. "May Allah prosper thee upon the voyage."

"Have I thy leave to go?"

"A moment yet. There is my son Marzak. He is approaching manhood, and it is time he entered the service of Allah and the State. It is my desire that he sail as thy lieutenant on this voyage, and that thou be his preceptor even as I was thine of old."

Now here was something that pleased Sakr-el-Bahr as little as it pleased Marzak. Knowing the bitter enmity borne him by the son of Fenzileh he had every cause to fear trouble if this project of Asad's were realized.

"As I was thine of old!" he answered with crafty wistfulness. "Wilt thou not put to sea with us to-morrow, O Asad? There is none like thee in all Islam, and what a joy were it not to stand beside thee on the prow as of old when we grapple with the Spaniard." Asad considered him.

"Dost thou, too, urge this?" quoth he.

"Have others urged it?"

The man's sharp wits, rendered still sharper by his sufferings, were cutting deeply and swiftly into this matter.

"They did well, but none could have urged it more fervently than I, for none knows so well as I the joy of battle against the infidel under thy command and the glory

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of prevailing in thy sight. Come then, my lord, upon this enterprise, and be thyself thine own son's preceptor, since 'tis the highest honor thou canst bestow upon him."

Thoughtfully Asad stroked his long white beard, his eagle eyes growing narrow.

"Thou temptest me, by Allah!"

"Let me do more——"

"Nay, more thou canst not. I am old and worn, and I am needed here. Shall an old lion hunt a young gazelle? Peace, peace! The sun has set upon my fighting day. Let the brood of fighters I have raised up keep that which my arm conquered and maintain my name and the glory of the Faith upon the seas."

He leaned upon Sakr-el-Bahr's shoulder and sighed, his eyes wistfully dreamy.

"It were a fond adventure in good truth. But no—I am resolved. Go thou and take Marzak with thee, and bring him safely home again."

"I should not return myself else," was the answer. "But my trust is in the All-knowing."

Upon that he departed, dissembling his profound vexation both at the voyage and the company, and went to bid Othmani make ready his great galeasse, equipping it with carronades, three hundred slaves to row it, and three hundred fighting men.

Asad-ed-Din returned to that darkened room in the Kasbah overlooking the courtyard, where Fenzileh and Marzak still lingered. He went to tell them that in compliance with the desires of both Marzak should go forth to prove himself upon this expedition.

But where he had left impatience he found thinly veiled wrath.

"O sun that warms me," Fenzileh greeted him, and from long experience he knew that the more endearing were her epithets the more vicious was her mood, "do then my counsels weigh as naught with thee, are they but as the dust upon thy shoes?"

"Less," said Asad, provoked out of his habitual indulgence of her licenses of speech.

"That is the truth, indeed!" she cried, bowing her head, whilst behind her the handsome face of her son was overcast.

"It is," Asad agreed. "At dawn, Marzak, thou settest forth upon the galeasse of Sakr-el-Bahr to take the seas under his tutelage and to emulate the skill and valor that have rendered him the stoutest bulwark of Islam, the very javelin of Allah."

"When I take the seas with that dog-descended Nasrani," he answered hoarsely, "he shall be where rightly he belongs—at the rowers' bench."

"How?" It was a bellow of rage.

Upon the word Asad swung to confront his son, and his face, suddenly inflamed, was so cruel and evil in its expression that it terrified that intriguing pair.

"By the beard of the Prophet! What words are these to me?"

He advanced upon Marzak until Fenzileh in sudden terror stepped between and faced him, like a lioness springing to defend her cub. But the Basha, enraged now by this want of submission in his son, enraged both against that son and the mother whom he knew had prompted him, caught her in his sinewy old hands, and flung her furiously aside, so that she stumbled and fell in a panting heap amid the cushions of her divan.

"The curse of Allah upon thee!" he screamed, and Marzak recoiled before him. "Has this presumptuous hell-cat who bore thee taught thee to stand before my face, to tell me what thou wilt and wilt not do? By the Koran! Too long have I endured her evil foreign ways, and now it seems she has taught thee how to tread them after her and how to beard thy very father! Tomorrow thou'lt take the sea with Sakr-el-Bahr. I have said it. Another word and thou'lt go aboard his galeasse even as thou saidst should be the case with him—at the rower's bench, to learn submission under the slave-master's whip."

Terrified, Marzak stood numb and silent, scarcely daring to draw breath. Never in all his life had he seen his father in a rage so royal. Yet it seemed to inspire no fear in Fenzileh, that congenital shrew whose tongue not even the threat of rods or hooks could silence.

"I shall pray Allah to restore sight to thy soul, O father of Marzak," she panted, "to teach thee to discriminate between those that love thee and the self-seekers that abuse thy trust."

"How?" he roared at her. "Art not yet done?"

"Nor ever shall be until I am lain dumb in death for having counseled thee out of my great love, O light of these poor eyes of mine."

"Maintain this tone," he said with concentrated anger, "and that will soon befall."

"I care not so that the sleek mask be

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plucked from the face of that dog-descended Sakr-el-Bahr. May Allah break his bones! What of those slaves of his—those two from England, O Asad? I am told that one is a woman, tall and of that white beauty which is the gift of Eblis to these Northerners. What is his purpose with her—that he would not show her in the *sôk* as the law prescribes, but comes slinking here to beg thee to set aside the law for him? Ha! I talk in vain. I have shown thee graver things to prove his vile disloyalty, and yet thou'lt fawn upon him whilst thy fangs are bared to thine own son."

He advanced upon her, stooped, caught her by the wrist, and heaved her up.

His face showed gray under its deep tan. His aspect terrified her at last, and made an end of her reckless froward courage.

He raised his voice to call.

"*Y-a anta!* Ayoub!"

She gasped, livid in her turn with sudden terror.

"My lord, my lord!" she whimpered. "Stream of my life, be not angry! What wilt thou do?"

He smiled evilly.

"Do?" he growled. "What I should have done ten years ago and more. We'll have the rods to thee."

And again he called, more insistently—

"Ayoub!"

"My lord, my lord!" she gasped in shuddering horror now that at last she found him set upon the thing to which so often she had dared him. "Pity! Pity!"

She groveled and embraced his knees.

"In the name of the Pitying the Pitiful be merciful upon the excesses to which my love for thee may have driven this poor tongue of mine. O my sweet lord! O father of Marzak!"

Her distress, her beauty, and perhaps, more than either, her unusual humility and submission may have moved him. For even as at that moment Ayoub—the sleek and portly eunuch, who was her wazeer and chamberlain—loomed in the inner doorway, salaaming, he vanished again upon the instant, dismissed by a peremptory wave of the Basha's hand.

Asad looked down upon her, sneering.

"That attitude becomes thee best," he said. "Continue it in future."

Contemptuously he shook himself free of her grasp, turned and stalked majestically out, wearing his anger like a royal mantle, and leaving behind him two terror-shaken beings, who felt as if they had looked over the very edge of death.

There was a long silence between them. Then at long length Fenzileh rose and crossed to the *meshrabiyah*—the latticed window-box. She opened it and took from one of its shelves an earthenware jar, placed there so as to receive the slightest breeze. From it she poured water into a little cup and drank greedily.

She slammed the inner lattice and turned to Marzak.

"And now?" quoth she.

"Now?" said the lad.

"Aye, what now? What are we to do? Are we to lie crushed under his rage until we are ruined indeed. He is bewitched. That jackal has enchanted him, so that he must deem well done all that is done by him. Allah guide us here, Marzak, or thou'lt be trampled into dust by Sakr-el-Bahr."

Marzak hung his head; slowly he moved to the divan and flung himself down upon its pillows; there he lay prone, his hands cupping his chin, his heels in the air.

"What can I do?" he asked at last.

"That is what I most desire to know. Something must be done, and soon. May his bones rot! If he lives thou art destroyed."

"Aye," said Marzak, with sudden vigor and significance. "If he lives!" And he sat up.

"Whilst we plan and plot, and our plans and plots come to naught save to provoke the anger of my father, we might be better employed in taking the shorter way."

She stood in the middle of the chamber, pondering him with gloomy eyes.

"I too have thought of that," said she. "I could hire me men to do the thing for a handful of gold. But the risk of it——"

"Where would be the risk once he is dead?"

"He might pull us down with him, and then what would our profit be in his death. Thy father would avenge him terribly."

"If it were craftily done we should not be discovered."

"Not be discovered?" she echoed, and laughed without mirth. "How young and blind thou art, O Marzak! We should be the first to be suspected. I have made no secret of my hate of him, and the people do not love me. They would urge thy father to do justice even were he himself averse to

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it, which I will not credit would be the case. This Sakr-el-Bahr—may Allah wither him!—is a god in their eyes. Bethink thee of the welcome given him? What Basha returning in triumph was ever greeted by the like? These victories that fortune has vouchsafed him have made them account him divinely favored and protected.

"I tell thee, Marzak, that did thy father die tomorrow Sakr-el-Bahr would be proclaimed Basha of Algiers in his stead, and wo betide us then."

"May his grave be defiled!" growled Marzak.

"His grave?" said she. "The difficulty is to dig it for him without hurt to ourselves. Shaitan protects the dog."

"May he make his bed in hell!" said Marzak.

"To curse him will not help us. Up, Marzak, and consider how the thing is to be done."

Marzak came to his feet, nimble and supple as a grey-hound.

"Listen now," he said. "Since I must go this voyage with him, perchance upon the seas on some dark night opportunity may serve me."

"Wait! Let me consider it. Allah guide me to find some way!"

She beat her hands together and bade the slave girl who answered her to summon her wazeer Ayoub, and bid a litter be prepared for her.

"We'll to the *sôk*, O Marzak, and see these slaves of his. Who knows but that something may be done by means of them! Guile will serve us better than mere strength against that misbegotten son of shame."

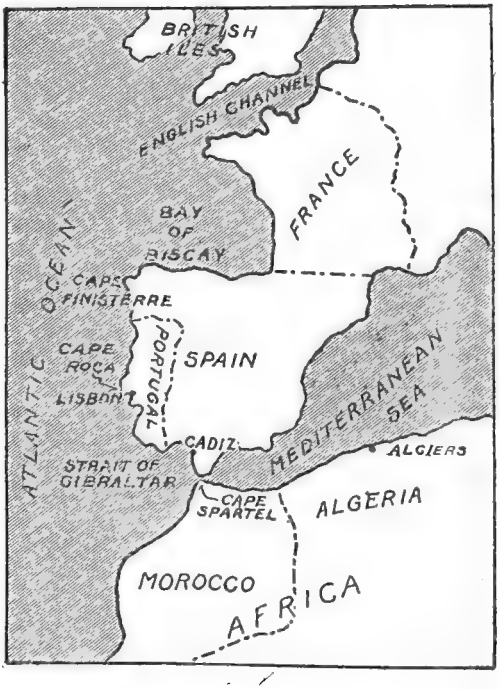
"May his house be destroyed!" said Marzak.

CHAPTER XVI

COMPETITORS

THE open space before the gates of the Sôk-el-Abeed was thronged with a motley, jostling, noisy crowd that at every moment was being swelled by the human streams pouring to mingle in it from the debouching labyrinth of narrow, unpaved streets.

There were brown-skinned Berbers in black goat-hair cloaks that were made in one piece with a cowl and decorated by a lozenge of red or orange color on the back, their shaven heads encased in skull-caps or simply bound in a cord of plaited camel-hair; there were black Saharowi, who went almost naked, and stately Arabs, who seemed over-muffled in their flowing robes of white with the cowls overshadowing their swarthy, finely featured faces; there were dignified and prosperous-looking Moors in brightly colored selhams astride of sleek mules, that were richly caparisoned; and there were Tagareenes, the banished Moors of Andalusia, most of whom followed the trade of slave-dealers; there were native Jews in sombre black *djellabas*, and Christian-Jews—so-called because bred in Christian countries, whose garments they still



wore; there were Levantine Turks, splendid of dress and arrogant of demeanor, and there were humble Coloiles, Kabyles and Biscaries.

Here a water-seller, laden with his goat-skin vessel, tinkled his little bell; there an orange-hawker, balancing a basket of the golden fruit upon his ragged turban, bawled his wares. There were men on foot and men on mules, men on donkeys and men on slim Arab horses, an ever-shifting medley of colors, all jostling, laughing, cursing in the ardent African sunshine under the blue sky where pigeons circled. In the shadow of the yellow tapia wall squatted a line of whining

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beggars and cripples, soliciting alms; near the gates a little space had been cleared, and an audience had gathered in a ring about a Meddah—a beggar-troubadour—who, to the accompaniment of *gimbri* and *gaitah* from two acolytes, chanted a doleful ballad in a thin, nasal voice.

Those of the crowd who were patrons of the market held steadily amain, and, leaving their mounts outside, passed through the gates through which there was no admittance for mere idlers and mean folk. Within the vast quadrangular space of bare, dry ground, enclosed by dust-colored walls, there was more space. The sale of slaves had not yet begun and was not due to begin for another hour, and meanwhile a little trading was being done by those merchants who had obtained the coveted right to set up their booths against the walls; they were vendors of wool, of fruit, of spices, and one or two traded in jewels and trinkets for the adornment of the Faithful.

A well was sunk in the middle of the ground, a considerable octagon with a low parapet in three steps. Upon the nethermost of these sat an aged, bearded Jew in a black *djellaba*, his head swathed in a colored kerchief. Upon his knees reposed a broad, shallow black box, divided into compartments, each filled with lesser gems and rare stones, which he was offering for sale; about him stood a little group of young Moors and one or two Turkish officers, with several of whom the old Israelite was haggling at once.

The whole of the northern wall was occupied by a long penthouse, its contents completely masked by curtains of camel-hair; from behind it proceeded a subdued murmur of human voices. These were the pens in which were confined the slaves to be offered for sale that day. Before the curtains, on guard, stood some dozen corsairs with attendant negro slaves.

Beyond and above the wall glistened the white dome of a *zowia*, flanked by a spear-like minaret and the tall heads of a few date palms whose long leaves hung motionless in the hot air.

Suddenly in the crowd beyond the gates there was a commotion. From one of the streets six colossal Nubians advanced with shouts of:

"*Oâk! Oâk! Wardal*" (Way! Make way!)

They were armed with great staves, grasped in their two hands, and with these they broke a path through that motley press, hurling men to right and left and earning a shower of curses in return.

"*Balak!* Make way! Way for the Lord Asad-ed-Din, the exalted of Allah! Way!"

The crowd, pressing back, went down upon its knees and groveled as Asad-ed-Din on a milk-white mule rode forward, escorted by Tsamanni his wazeer and a cloud of black-robed janizaries with flashing simitars.

The curses that had greeted the violence of his negroes were suddenly silenced; instead, blessings as fervent filled the air.

"May Allah increase thy might! May Allah lengthen thy days! The blessings of our Lord Mahomet upon thee! Allah send thee more victories!" were the benedictions that showered upon him on every hand.

He returned them as became a man who was supremely pious and devout.

"The peace of Allah upon the Faithful of the Prophet's House," he would murmur in response from time to time, until at last he had reached the gates.

There he bade Tsamanni fling a purse to the crouching beggars—for is it not written in the Most Perspicuous Book that of alms ye shall bestow what ye can spare, for such as are saved from their own greed shall prosper, and whatever ye give in alms, as seeking the face of Allah, shall be doubled unto you?

Submissive to the laws as the meanest of his subjects, Asad dismounted and passed on foot into the *sôk*. He came to a halt by the well, and, facing the curtained penthouse, he blessed the kneeling crowd and commanded all to rise.

He beckoned Sakr-el-Bahr's officer Ali—who was in charge of the slaves of the corsair's latest raid—and announced his will to inspect the captives. At a sign from Ali, the negroes flung aside the camel-hair curtains and let the fierce sunlight beat in upon those pent-up wretches; they were not only the captives taken by Sakr-el-Bahr, but some others who were the result of one or two lesser raids by Biskaine.

Asad beheld a huddle of men and women—though the proportion of women was very small—of all ages, races, and conditions; there were pale, fair-haired men from France or from the North, olive-skinned Italians and swarthy Spaniards, negroes and half-castes; there were old men, young

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men and mere children, some handsomely dressed, some almost naked, others hung with rags. In the hopeless dejection of their countenances alone was there any uniformity. But it was not a dejection that could awaken pity in the pious heart of Asad. They were unbelievers who would never look upon the face of God's Prophet, accursed and unworthy of any tenderness from man.

For a moment his glance was held by a lovely black-haired Spanish girl, who sat with her locked hands held fast between her knees, in an attitude of intense despair and suffering—the glory of her eyes increased and magnified by the dark brown stains of sleeplessness surrounding them. Leaning on Tsamanni's arm, he stood considering her for a little while; then his glance traveled on. Suddenly he tightened his grasp of Tsamanni's arm, and a quick interest leaped into his sallow face.

On the uppermost tier of the pen that he was facing sat a very glory of womanhood, such a woman as he had heard tell existed but the like of which he had never yet beheld. She was tall and graceful as a cypress-tree; her skin was white as milk, her eyes two darkest sapphires, her head of a coppery golden that seemed to glow like metal as the sunlight caught it. She was dressed in a close gown of white, the bodice cut low and revealing the immaculate loveliness of her neck.

Asad-ed-Din turned to Ali.

"What pearl is this that hath been cast upon this dung-heap?" he asked.

"She is the woman our lord Sakr-el-Bahr carried off from England."

Slowly the Basha's eyes returned to consider her, and insensible though she had deemed herself by now, he saw her cheeks slowly reddening under the cold insult of his steady, insistent glance. The glow heightened her beauty, effacing the weariness which the face had worn.

"Bring her forth," said the Basha shortly.

She was seized by two of the negroes, and to avoid being roughly handled by them she came at once, bracing herself to bear with dignity whatever might await her. A golden-haired young man beside her, his face haggard and stubbled with a beard of some growth, looked up in alarm as she was taken from his side. Then, with a groan, he made as if to clutch her, but a rod fell upon his raised arms and beat them down.

Asad was thoughtful. It was Fenzileh who had bidden him come look at the infidel maid whom Sakr-el-Bahr had risked so much to snatch from England, suggesting that in her he would behold some proof of the bad faith which she was forever urging against the corsair leader. Out of curiosity had he obeyed her prompting. But that and all else were forgotten now in the contemplation of this noble ensample of Northern womanhood, statuesque almost in her terrible restraint.

He put forth a hand to touch her arm, and she drew it back as if his fingers were of fire.

He sighed.

"How inscrutable are the ways of Allah, that He should suffer so luscious a fruit to hang from the foul tree of infidelity!"

Tsamanni watching him craftily, a master-sycophant profoundly learned in the art of playing upon his master's moods, made answer:

"Even so perchance that a Faithful of the Prophet's House may pluck it. Verily all things are possible to the One!"

"Yet is it not set down in the Book to be Read that the daughters of the infidel are not for True-Believers?"

But Tsamanni, knowing full well how the Basha would like to be answered, trimmed his reply to that desire.

"Allah is great, and what hath befallen once may well befall again, my lord."

Asad's kindling eyes flashed a glance at his wazeer.

"Thou meanest Fenzileh. But then, by the mercy of Allah, I was rendered the instrument of her enlightenment."

"It may well be written that thou shalt be the same again, my lord," murmured the insidious Tsamanni.

There was more stirring in his mind than the mere desire to play the courtier now. 'Twixt Fenzileh and himself there had long been a feud begotten of the jealousy which each inspired the other where Asad was concerned. Were Fenzileh removed the wazeer's influence must grow and spread to his own profit. It was a thing of which he had often dreamed, but a dream he feared that was never like to be realized, for Asad was aging, and the fires that had burned so fiercely in his earlier years seemed now to have consumed in him all thought of women. Yet here was one as by a miracle, of a beauty so amazing and so diverse from any that

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ever yet had feasted the Basha's sight, that plainly she had acted as a charm upon his senses.

"She is white as the snows upon the Atlas, luscious as the dates of Tafilalt," he murmured fondly, his gleaming eyes considering her what time she stood immovable before him.

Suddenly he looked about him, and wheeled upon Tsamanni, his manner swiftly becoming charged with anger.

"Her face has been bared to a thousand eyes and more," he cried.

"Even that has been so before," replied Tsamanni.

AND then quite suddenly at their elbow a voice that was naturally soft and musical of accent but now rendered harsh, cut in to ask—

"What woman may this be?"

Startled, both the Basha and his wazeer swung round. Fenzileh, becomingly veiled and hooded, stood before them, escorted by Marzak. A little behind them were the eunuchs and the litter in which, unperceived by Asad, she had been borne thither. Beside the litter stood her wazeer Ayoub-el-Samin.

Asad scowled down upon her, for he had not yet recovered from the resentment she and Marzak had provoked in him. Moreover, that in private she should be lacking in the respect which was his due was evil enough, though he had tolerated it. But that she should make so bold as to thrust in and question him in this peremptory fashion before all the world was more than his dignity could suffer.

Never yet had she dared so much, nor would she have dared it now but that her sudden anxiety had effaced all caution from her mind. Her hold upon Asad was growing tenuous. To snap it utterly no more was necessary than that he who of late years had scarce bestowed a thought or glance upon a woman should be taken with the fancy to bring some new recruit to his harem.

Hence her desperate, reckless courage to stand thus before him now, for although her face was veiled there was hardy arrogance in every line of her figure. Of his scowl she took no slightest heed.

"If this be the slave fetched by Sakr-el-Bahr from England, then rumor has lied to me," she said. "I vow it was scarce worth so long a voyage and the endangering so many valuable Moslem lives to fetch this yellow-faced, long-shanked daughter of perdition into Barbary."

Asad's surprize beat down his anger. He was not subtle.

"Yellow-faced? Long-shanked?" quoth he.

Then reading Fenzileh at last, he displayed a slow, crooked smile.

"Already have I observed thee to grow hard of hearing, and now thy sight is failing too it seems. Assuredly thou art growing old."

And he looked her over with such an eye of displeasure that she recoiled.

He stepped close up to her.

"Too long already hast thou queened it in my harem with thine infidel, Frankish ways," he muttered, so that none but those immediately about overheard his angry words.

"Thou art become a very scandal in the eyes of the Faithful," he added very grimly. "It were well, perhaps, that we amended that."

Abruptly then he turned away, and by a gesture he ordered Ali to return the slave to her place among the others. Leaning on the arm of Tsamanni he took some steps towards the entrance, then halted, and turned again to Fenzileh:

"To thy litter," he bade her peremptorily, rebuking her thus before all, "and get thee to the house as becomes a seemly Moslem woman. Nor ever again let thyself be seen roving the public places afoot."

She obeyed him instantly, without a murmur; and he himself lingered at the gates with Tsamanni until her litter had passed out, escorted by Ayoub and Marzak walking each on one side of it and neither daring to meet the angry eye of the Basha.

Asad looked sourly after that litter, a sneer on his heavy lips.

"As her beauty wanes so her presumption waxes," he growled. "She is growing old, Tsamanni—old and lean and shrewish, and no fit mate for a Member of the Prophet's House. It were perhaps a pleasing thing in the sight of Allah that we replaced her."

And then, referring obviously to that other one, his eye turning towards the penthouse the curtains of which were being drawn again, he changed his tone.

"Didst thou mark, O Tsamanni, with what a grace she moved?—lithely and nobly

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as a young gazelle. Verily, so much beauty was never created by the All-Wise to be cast into the Pit."

"May it not have been sent to comfort some True-Believer?" wondered the subtle wazeer. "To Allah all things are possible."

"Why else, indeed?" said Asad. "It was written; and even as none may obtain what is not written, so none may avoid what is. I am resolved. Stay thou here, Tsamanni. Remain for the outcry and purchase her. She shall be taught the True Faith. She shall be saved from the furnace."

The command had come, the thing that Tsamanni had so ardently desired.

He licked his lips.

"And the price, my lord?" he asked, in a small voice.

"Price?" quoth Asad. "Have I not bid thee purchase her? Bring her to me, though her price be a thousand philips."

"A thousand philips!" echoed Tsamanni amazed. "Allah is great!"

But already Asad had left his side and passed out under the arched gateway, where the crowd was groveling anew at sight of him.

It was a fine thing for Asad to bid him remain for the sale. But the dalal would part with no slave until the money was forthcoming, and Tsamanni had no considerable sum upon his person. Therefore in the wake of his master he set out forthwith to the Kasbah. It wanted still an hour before the sale would be held and he had time and to spare in which to go and return.

It happened, however, that Tsamanni was malicious, and that the hatred of Fenzileh which so long he had consumed in silence and dissembled under fawning smiles and profound salaams included also her servants. There was none in all the world of whom he entertained a greater contempt than her sleek and greasy eunuch Ayoub-el-Samin of the majestic, rolling gait and fat, supercilious lips.

It was written, too, that in the courtyard of the Kasbah he should stumble upon Ayoub, who indeed had by his mistress's commands been set to watch for the wazeer. The fat fellow rolled forward, his hands supporting his paunch, his little eyes agleam.

"Allah increase thy health, Tsamanni," was his courteous greeting. "Thou bearest news?"

"News? What news?" quoth Tsamanni. "In truth none that will gladden thy mistress."

"Merciful Allah! What now? Doth it concern that Frankish slave-girl?"

"By the Koran thou tremblest, Ayoub!" Tsamanni mocked him. "Thy soft fat is all a-quivering; and well it may, for thy days are numbered, O father of nothing."

"Dost deride me, dog?" came the other's voice, shrill now with anger.

"Callest me dog? Thou?" Deliberately Tsamanni spat upon his shadow. "Go tell thy mistress that I am bidden by my lord to buy the Frankish girl. Tell her that my lord will take her to wife, even as he took Fenzileh, that he may lead her into the True Belief and cheat *Shaitan* of so fair a jewel. Add that I am bidden to buy her though she cost my lord a thousand philips. Bear her that message, O father of wind, and may Allah increase thy paunch!"

And he was gone, lithe, active, and mocking.

"May thy sons perish and thy daughters become harlots," roared the eunuch, maddened at once by this evil news and the insult with which it was accompanied.

But Tsamanni only laughed as he answered him over his shoulder—

"May thy sons be sultans all, Ayoub!"

Quivering still with a rage that entirely obliterated his alarm at what he had learned, Ayoub rolled into the presence of his mistress with that evil message.

She listened to him in a dumb white fury.

"We must act, Ayoub, and act swiftly, or I am destroyed and with me will be destroyed Marzak, who alone could not stand against his father's face. Sakr-el-Bahr will trample us into the dust." She checked on a sudden thought. "By Allah, it may have been a part of his design to have brought hither that white-faced wench. But we must thwart him, and we must thwart Asad, or thou art ruined too, Ayoub."

"Thwart him?"

"First, Ayoub, to place this Frankish girl beyond his reach."

"That is well-thought—but how?"

"How? Can thy wit suggest no way? Hast thou wits at all in that fat head of thine? Thou shalt outbid Tsamanni, or, better still, set some one else to do it for thee, and so buy the girl for me. Then we'll contrive that she shall vanish quietly and quickly before Asad can discover a trace of her."

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His face blanched, and the wattles about his jaws were shaking.

"And—and the cost? Hast thou counted the cost, O Fenzileh? What will happen when Asad gains knowledge of this thing?"

"He shall gain no knowledge of it," she answered him. "Or if he does, the girl, being gone beyond recall, he shall submit him to what was written. Trust me to know how to bring him to it."

"Lady, lady!" he cried, and wrung his bunches of fat fingers. "I dare not engage in this!"

"Engage in what? If I bid thee go buy this girl, and give thee the money thou'lt require, what else concerns thee, dog? What else is to be done, a man shall do. Come now, thou shalt have the money, all I have, which is a matter of some fifteen hundred philips, and what is not laid out upon this purchase thou shalt retain for thyself."

He considered an instant, and conceived that she was right. None could blame him for executing the commands she gave him. And there would be profit in it, clearly—aye, and it would be sweet to outbid that dog Tsamanni and send him empty-handed home to face the wrath of his frustrated master.

He spread his hands and salaamed in token of complete acquiescence.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SLAVE-MARKET

AT THE Sôk-el-Abeed it was the hour of the outcry, announced by a blast of trumpets and the thudding of tom-toms. The traders who until then had been licensed to ply within the enclosure now put up the shutters of their little booths. The Hebrew pedler of gems closed his box and effaced himself, leaving the steps about the well clear for the most prominent patrons of the market. These hastened to assemble there, surrounding it and facing outward, whilst the rest of the crowd was ranged against the southern and western walls of the enclosure.

Came negro water-carriers in white turbans with aspersers made of palmetto leaves to sprinkle the ground and lay the dust against the tramp of slaves and buyers. The trumpets ceased for an instant, then wound a fresh imperious blast and fell permanently silent. The crowd about the gates fell back to right and left, and very slowly and stately three tall dalals, dressed from head to foot in white and with immaculate turbans wound about their heads, advanced into the open space. They came to a halt at the western end of the long wall, the chief dalal standing slightly in advance of the other two.

The chattering of voices sank upon their advent, it became a hissing whisper, then a faint drone like that of bees, and then utter silence. In the solemn and grave demeanor of the dalals there was something almost sacerdotal, so that when that silence fell upon the crowd the affair took on the aspect of a sacrament.

The chief dalal stood forward a moment as if in an abstraction, with downcast eyes, then with hands outstretched to catch a blessing he raised his voice and began to pray in a monotonous chant:

"In the name of Allah the Pitying the Pitiful Who created man from clots of blood! All that is in the Heavens and in the Earth praiseth Allah, Who is the Mighty, the Wise! His the kingdom of the Heavens and of the Earth. He maketh alive and killeth, and He hath power over all things. He is the first and the last, the seen and the unseen, and He knoweth all things."

"Amen," replied the crowd, as with a stir and rustle the close ranks relaxed from the tense attitude of prayer, and each man sought elbow-room.

The dalal beat his hands together, whereupon the curtains were drawn aside and the huddled slaves displayed—some three hundred in all, occupying three several pens.

In the front rank of the middle pen—the one containing Rosamund and Lionel—stood a couple of stalwart young Nubians, sleek and muscular, who looked on with completest indifference, no whit appalled by the fate which had haled them thither. They caught the eye of the dalal, and although the usual course was for a buyer to indicate a slave he was prepared to purchase, yet to the end that good beginning should be promptly made, the dalal himself pointed out that stalwart pair to the corsairs who stood on guard. In compliance the two negroes were brought forth.

"Here is a noble twain," the dalal announced, "strong of muscle and long of

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limb, as all may see, whom it were a shameful thing to separate. Who needs such a pair for strong labor let him say what he will give."

He set out on a slow circuit of the well, the corsairs urging the two slaves to follow him that all buyers might see and inspect them.

In the foremost ranks of the crowd near the gate stood Ali, sent thither by Othmani to purchase a score of stout fellows required to make up the contingent of the galeasse of Sakr-el-Bahr.

"I need such tall fellows for the oars of Sakr-el-Bahr," said he with loud importance, thus drawing upon himself the eyes of the assembly, and sunning himself in the admiring looks bestowed upon one of the officers of Oliver-Reis, one of the rovers who were the pride of Islam and a sword-edge to the infidel.

"They were born to toil nobly at the oar, O Ali-Reis," replied the dalal in all solemnity. "What wilt thou give for them?"

"Two hundred philips for the twain."

The dalal paced solemnly on, the slaves following in his wake.

"Two hundred philips am I offered for a pair of the lustiest slaves that by the favor of Allah were ever brought into this market. Who will say fifty philips more?"

"Two hundred and twenty for the twain," said a Moor, and the dalal passed on with his wares, announcing the increased price he had been offered.

Thus he completed the circuit and came to stand once more before Ali.

"Two hundred and twenty is now the price, O Ali! By the Koran, they are worth three hundred at the least. Wilt say three hundred?"

"Two hundred and thirty," was the answer.

Back to the Moor went the dalal.

"Two hundred and thirty I am now offered, O Hamet. Thou wilt give another twenty?"

"Not another asper."

"They are thine, then, O Ali, for two hundred and thirty. Give thanks to Allah for so good a bargain."

The Nubians were surrendered to Ali's followers, whilst the dalal's two assistants advanced to settle accounts with the corsair.

"Wait, wait," said he, "is not the name of Sakr-el-Bahr good warranty?"

"The inviolable law is that the purchase money be paid ere a slave leaves the market, O valiant Ali."

"It shall be observed," was the impatient answer, "and I will so pay before they leave. But I want others yet, and we will make one account an it please thee. That fellow yonder now. I have orders to buy him for my captain." And he indicated Lionel, who stood at Rosamund's side, the very incarnation of wofulness and debility.

Contemptuous surprize flickered an instant in the eyes of the dalal. But this he made haste to dissemble.

"Bring forth that yellow-haired infidel," he commanded.

"Dost want him for the oar, Ali?" cried Ayoub-el-Samin across the quadrangle, a jest this that evoked a general laugh.

"What else?" quoth Ali. "He should be cheap at least."

"Cheap?" quoth the dalal in an affectation of surprize. "Nay, now. 'Tis a comely fellow and a young one. What wilt thou give, now? A hundred philips?"

"A hundred philips?" cried Ali derisively. "A hundred philips for that skinful of bones! *Ma'sh'Allahl* Five philips is my price, O dalal."

Again laughter crackled through the mob. But the dalal stiffened with increasing dignity. Some of that laughter seemed to touch himself, and he was not a person to be made the butt of mirth.

"'Tis a jest, my master," said he, with a forgiving yet contemptuous wave. "Behold how sound he is."

He signed to one of the corsairs, and Lionel's doublet was slit from neck to girdle and wrenched away from his body, leaving him naked to the waist, and displaying better proportions than might have been expected. In a passion at that indignity Lionel writhed in the grip of his guards, until one of the corsairs struck him a light blow with a whip in earnest of what to expect if he continued to be troublesome.

"Consider him now," said the dalal, pointing to that white torso. "And behold how sound he is. See how excellent are his teeth."

He seized Lionel's head and forced the jaws apart.

"Aye," said Ali, "but consider me those lean shanks and that woman's arm."

"'Tis a fault the oar will mend," the dalal insisted.

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"You filthy blackamoors!" burst from Lionel in a sob of rage.

"He is muttering curses in his infidel tongue," said Ali. "His temper is none too good, you see. I have said five philips. I'll say no more."

With a shrug the dalal began his circuit of the well, the corsairs thrusting Lionel after him. Here one rose to handle him, there another, but none seemed disposed to purchase.

"Five philips is the foolish price offered me for this fine young Frank," cried the dalal. "Will no True-Believer pay ten for such a slave? Wilt not thou, O Ayoub? Thou, Hamet—ten philips?"

But one after another those to whom he was offered shook their heads. The haggardness of Lionel's face was too unprepossessing. They had seen slaves with that look before, and experience told them that no good was ever to be done with such fellows. Moreover, though shapely, his muscles were too slight, his flesh looked too soft and tender. Even at five philips he would be dear. So the disgusted dalal came back to Ali.

"He is thine, then, for five philips—Allah pardon thy avarice."

Ali grinned, and his men seized upon Lionel and bore him off into the background to join the two negroes previously purchased.

And then before Ali could bid for another of the slaves he desired to acquire a tall, elderly Jew, dressed in black doublet and hose like a Castilian gentleman, with a ruffle at his neck, a plumed bonnet on his gray locks, and a serviceable dagger hanging from his girdle of hammered gold, had claimed the attention of the dalal.

In the pen that held the captives of the lesser raids conducted by Biskaine sat an Andalusian girl of perhaps some twenty years, of a beauty entirely Spanish. Her face was of the warm pallor of ivory, her massed hair of an ebony black, her eyebrows were finely pencilled, and her eyes of deepest and softest brown.

She had attracted the Jew's notice, and it is not impossible that there may have stirred in him a desire to avenge upon her some of the cruel wrongs, some of the rackings, burning, confiscations, and banishment suffered by the men of his race at the hands of the men of hers. He may have bethought him of invaded ghettos, of Jewish maidens ravished, and Jewish children butchered in the name of the God those Spanish Christians worshipped, for there was something almost of contemptuous fierceness in his dark eyes and in the hand he flung out to indicate her.

"Yonder is a Castilian wench for whom I will give fifty philips, O dalal," he announced.

The dalal made a sign, whereupon the corsairs dragged her struggling forth.

"So much loveliness may not be bought for fifty philips, O Ibrahim," said he. "Yusuf here will pay sixty at least."

And he stood expectantly before a resplendent Moor.

The Moor, however, shook his head.

"Allah knows I have three wives who would destroy her loveliness within the hour, and so leave me the loser."

The dalal moved on, the girl following him, but contesting every step of the way with those who impelled her forward, and reviling them too in hot Castilian. She drove her nails into the arms of one and spat fiercely into the face of another of her corsair guards.

Rosamund's weary eyes quickened to horror as she watched her—a horror prompted as much by the fate awaiting that poor child as by the undignified fury of the futile battle she waged against it. But it happened that her behavior impressed a Levantine Turk quite differently. He rose, a short squat figure, from his seat on the steps of the well.

"Sixty philips will I pay for the joy of taming that wild cat," said he.

But Ibrahim was not to be outbidden. He offered seventy, the Turk countered with a bid of eighty, and Ibrahim again raised the price to ninety, and there fell a pause.

The dalal spurred on the Turk.

"Wilt thou be beaten then, and by an Israelite? Shall this lovely maid be given to a perverter of the Scriptures, to an inheritor of the fire, to one of a race that would not bestow on their fellow-men so much as the speck out of a date-stone? It were a shame upon a True-Believer."

Urged thus the Turk offered another five philips, but with obvious reluctance. The Jew, however, entirely unabashed by a tirade against him, the like of which he heard a score of times a day in the course of trading, pulled forth a heavy purse from his girdle.

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"Here are one hundred philips," he announced. "'Tis overmuch. But I offer it."

Ere the dalal's pious and seductive tongue could urge him further the Turk sat down again with a gesture of finality.

"I give him joy of her," said he.

"She is thine, then, O Ibrahim, for one hundred philips."

The Israelite relinquished the purse to the dalal's white-robed assistants and advanced to receive the girl. The corsairs thrust her forward against him, still vainly battling, and his arms closed about her for a moment.

"Thou hast cost me dear, thou daughter of Spain," said he. "But I am content. Come."

And he made shift to lead her away. Suddenly, however, fierce as a tiger-cat she writhed her arms upwards and clawed at his face. With a scream of pain he relaxed his hold of her, and in that moment, quick as lightning she plucked the dagger that hung from his girdle so temptingly within her reach.

"*Valga me Dios!*" she cried, and ere a hand could be raised to prevent her she had buried the blade in her lovely breast and sank in a laughing, coughing heap at his feet.

A final convulsive heave and she lay there quite still, whilst Ibrahim glared down at her with eyes of dismay, and over all the market there hung a hush of sudden awe.

Rosamund had risen in her place, and a faint color came to warm her pallor, a faint light kindled in her eyes. God had shown her the way through this poor Spanish girl, and assuredly God would give her the means to take it when her own turn came.

At length Ibrahim roused himself from his momentary stupor. He stepped deliberately across the body, his face inflamed, and stood to beard the impassive dalal.

"She is dead!" he bleated. "I am defrauded. Give me back my gold!"

"Are we to give back the price of every slave that dies?" the dalal questioned him.

"But she was not yet delivered to me," raved the Jew. "My hands had not touched her. Give me back my gold."

"Thou liest, son of a dog," was the answer, dispassionately delivered. "She was thine already. I had so pronounced her. Bear her hence, since she belongs to thee."

The Jew, his face empurpling, seemed to fight for breath.

"How?" he choked. "Am I to lose a hundred philips?"

"What is written is written," replied the serene dalal.

Ibrahim was frothing at the lips, his eyes were blood-injected.

"But it was never written that——"

"Peace," said the dalal. "Had it not been written it could not have come to pass. It is the will of Allah! Who dares rebel against it?"

The crowd began to murmur.

"I want my hundred philips," the Jew insisted, whereupon the murmur swelled into a sudden roar.

"Thou hearest?" said the dalal. "Allah pardon thee, thou art disturbing the peace of this market. Away, ere ill betide thee."

"Hence! Hence!" roared the crowd, and some advanced threateningly upon the luckless Ibrahim. "Away, thou perverter of Holy Writ! Thou filth! Thou dog! Away!"

Such was the uproar, such the menace of angry countenances and clenched fists shaken in his very face, that Ibrahim quailed and forgot his loss in fear.

"I go, I go," he said, and turned hastily to depart.

But the dalal summoned him back.

"Take hence thy property," said he, and pointed to the body.

And so Ibrahim was forced to suffer the further mockery of summoning his slaves to bear away the lifeless body for which he had paid in lively potent gold.

The dalal turned to the portly Ayoub, who was plucking at his sleeve.

He bent his head to catch the muttered words of Fenzileh's wazeer. Then, in obedience to them, he ordered Rosamund to be brought forward.

SHE offered no least resistance, advancing in a singularly lifeless way, like a sleep-walker or one who had been drugged. In the heat and glare of the open market she stood by the dalal's side at the head of the well, whilst he dilated upon her physical merits in that *lingua franca* which he used since it was current coin among all the assorted races represented there—a language which the knowledge of French that her residence in France had taught her she was to her increasing horror and shame able to understand.

The first to make an offer for her was that

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same portly Moor who had sought to purchase the two Nubians. He rose to scrutinize her closely, and must have been satisfied, for the price he offered was a good one, and he offered it with contemptuous assurance that he would not be outbidden.

"One hundred philips for the milk-faced girl."

"'Tis not enough. Consider me the moon-bright loveliness of her face," said the dalal as he moved on. "Chigil yields us fair women, but no woman of Chigil was ever half so fair."

"One hundred and fifty," said the Levantine Turk with a snap.

"Not yet enough. Behold the stately height which Allah hath vouchsafed her. See the noble carriage of her head, the luster of her eye! By Allah, she is worthy to grace the Sultan's own harem."

He said no more than the buyers recognized to be true, and excitement stirred faintly through their usually impassive ranks. A Tagareen Moor named Yussuf offered at once two hundred.

But still the dalal continued to sing her praises. He held up one of her arms for inspection, and she submitted with lowered eyes, and no sign of resentment beyond the slow flush that spread across her face and vanished again.

"Behold me these limbs, smooth as Arabian silks and whiter than ivory. Look at those lips like pomegranate blossoms. The price is now two hundred philips. What wilt thou give, O Hamet?"

Hamet showed himself angry that his original bid should so speedily have been doubled.

"By the Koran, I have purchased three sturdy girls from the Sus for less."

"Wouldst thou compare a squat-faced girl from the Sus with this narcissus-eyed glory of womanhood?" scoffed the dalal.

"Two hundred and ten, then," was Hamet's sulky grunt.

The watchful Tsamanni considered that the time had come to buy her for his lord as he had been bidden.

"Three hundred," he said curtly, to make an end of matters, and——

"Four hundred," instantly piped a shrill voice behind him.

He span round in his amazement and met the leering face of Ayoub. A murmur ran through the ranks of the buyers, the people craned their necks to catch a glimpse of this open-handed purchaser.

Yusuf the Tagareen rose up in a passion. He announced angrily that never again should the dust of the *sôk* of Algiers defile his slippers, that never again would he come there to purchase slaves.

"By the Well of Zem-Zem," he swore, "all men are bewitched in this market. Four hundred philips for a Frankish girl! May Allah increase your wealth, for verily you'll need it."

And in his supreme disgust he stalked to the gates, and elbowed his way through the crowd, and so vanished from the *sôk*.

Yet ere he was out of earshot her price had risen further. Whilst Tsamanni was recovering from his surprize at the competitor that had suddenly appeared before him, the dalal had ured an increased offer from the Turk.

"'Tis a madness," the latter deplored. "But she pleaseth me, and should it seem good to Allah the Merciful to lead her into the True Faith she may yet become the light of my harem. Four hundred and twenty philips, then, O dalal, and Allah pardon me my prodigality."

Yet scarcely was his little speech concluded than Tsamanni with laconic eloquence rapped out—

"Five hundred."

"*Y'Allah!*" cried the Turk, raising his hands to heaven, and, "*Y'Allah!*" echoed the crowd.

"Five hundred and fifty," shrilled Ayoub's voice above the general din.

"Six hundred," replied Tsamanni, still unmoved.

And now such was the general hubbub provoked by these unprecedented prices that the dalal was forced to raise his voice and cry for silence.

When this was restored Ayoub at once raised the price to seven hundred.

"Eight hundred," snapped Tsamanni, showing at last a little heat.

"Nine hundred," replied Ayoub.

Tsamanni swung round upon him again, white now with fury.

"Is this a jest, O father of wind?" he cried, and excited laughter by the taunt implicit in that appellation.

"An thou'rt the jester," replied Ayoub with forced calm, "thou'lt find the jest a costly one."

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With a shrug Tsamanni turned again to the dalal.

"A thousand philips," said he shortly.

"Silence there!" cried the dalal again. "Silence, and praise Allah who sends good prices."

"One thousand and one hundred," said Ayoub the irrepressible.

And now Tsamanni not only found himself outbidden, but he had reached the outrageous limit appointed by Asad. He lacked authority to go further, dared not do so without first consulting the Basha. Yet if he left the *sôk* for that purpose Ayoub would meanwhile secure the girl. He found himself between sword and wall. On the one hand did he permit himself to be outbidden his master might visit upon him his disappointment. On the other, did he continue beyond the limit so idly mentioned as being far beyond all possibility, it might fare no less ill with him.

He turned to the crowd, waving his arms in furious gesticulation.

"By the beard of the Prophet, this bladder of wind and grease makes sport of us. He has no intent to buy. What man ever heard of the half of such a price for a slave girl?"

Ayoub's answer was eloquent; he produced a fat bag and flung it on the ground, where it fell with a mellow chink.

"There is my sponsor," he made answer, grinning in the very best of humors, savoring to the full his enemy's rage and discomfiture, and savoring it at no cost to himself. "Shall I count out one thousand and one hundred philips, O dalal?"

"If the wazeer Tsamanni is content."

"Dost thou know for whom I buy?" roared Tsamanni. "For the Basha himself, Asad-ed-Din, the exalted of Allah."

He advanced upon Ayoub with hands upheld.

"What shalt thou say to him, O dog, when he calls thee to account for daring to outbid him?"

But Ayoub remained unruffled before all this fury. He spread his fat hands, his eyes twinkling, his great lips pursed.

"How should I know, since Allah has not made me all-knowing? Thou shouldst have said so earlier. 'Tis thus I shall answer the Basha should he question me, and the Basha is just."

And so they stood glaring each at the other until the dalal called them back to the business that was to do.

"The price is now one thousand and one hundred philips. Wilt thou suffer defeat, O wazeer?"

"Since Allah wills. I have no authority to go further."

"Then at one thousand and one hundred philips, Ayoub, she is——"

But the sale was not yet to be completed. From the dense and eager throng about the gates rang a crisp voice—

"One thousand and two hundred philips for the Frankish girl."

The dalal, who had conceived that the limits of madness had been already reached, stood gaping now in fresh amazement. The mob crowed and cheered and roared between enthusiasm and derision, and even Tsamanni brightened to see another champion enter the lists who perhaps would avenge him upon Ayoub. The crowd parted quickly to right and left, and through it into the open strode Sakr-el-Bahr. They recognized him instantly, and his name was shouted in acclamation by that idolizing multitude.

That Barbary name of his conveyed no information to Rosamund, and her back being turned to the entrance she did not see him. But she had recognized his voice, and she had shuddered at the sound. She could make nothing of the bidding, nor what the purpose that surely underlay it to account for the extraordinary excitement of the traders. Vaguely had she been wondering what dastardly purpose Oliver might intend to serve, but now that she heard his voice that wonder ceased and understanding took its place. He had hung there somewhere in the crowd waiting until all competitors but one should have been outbidden, and now he stepped forth to buy her for his own—his slave!

She closed her eyes a moment and prayed God that he might not prevail in his intent. And she was herself again. She heard the crowd thundering, "*Ma'sh'Allah!*" and, "Sakr-el-Bahr!" and the dalal clamoring sternly for silence. When this was at last restored she heard his exclamation:

"The glory to Allah who sends eager buyers! What sayest thou, O wazeer Ayoub?"

"Aye!" sneered Tsamanni, "what now?"

"One thousand and three hundred," said Ayoub with a quaver of uneasy defiance.

"Another hundred, O dalal," came from Sakr-el-Bahr in a quiet voice.

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"One thousand and five hundred," screamed Ayoub, thus reaching not only the limit imposed by his mistress, but the very limit of the resources at her immediate disposal.

Gone, too, with that bid was all hope of profit to himself.

But Sakr-el-Bahr, impassive as Fate, and without so much as deigning to bestow a look upon the quivering eunuch, said again—

"Another hundred, O dalal."

"One thousand and six hundred philips!" cried the dalal, more in amazement than to announce the figure reached. Then controlling his emotions he bowed his head in reverence and made confession of his faith.

"All things are possible if Allah wills them. The praise to Him who sends wealthy buyers."

He turned to the crestfallen Ayoub, so crestfallen that in the contemplation of him Tsamanni was fast gathering consolation for his own discomfiture, vicariously tasting the sweets of vengeance.

"What say you now, O perspicuous wazeer?"

"I say," choked Ayoub, "that since by the favor of Shaitan he hath so much wealth he must prevail."

But the insulting words were scarcely uttered than Sakr-el-Bahr's great hand had taken the wazeer by the nape of his fat neck, a growl of anger running through the assembly to approve him.

"By the favor of Shaitan, sayest thou, thou sexless dog?" he growled, and tightened his grip so that the wazeer squirmed and twisted in an agony of pain.

Down was his head thrust, and still down, until his fat body gave way and he lay supine and writhing in the dust of the *sôk*.

"Shall I strangle thee, thou father of filth, or shall I fling thy soft flesh to the hooks to teach thee what is a man's due from thee?"

And as he spoke he rubbed the too daring fellow's face roughly on the ground.

"Mercy!" squealed the wazeer. "Mercy, O mighty Sakr-el-Bahr, as thou lookest for mercy!"

"Unsay thy words, thou offal. Pronounce thyself a liar and a dog."

"I do unsay them. I have foully lied. Thy wealth is the reward sent thee by Allah for thy glorious victories over the unbelieving."

"Put out thine offending tongue," said Sakr-el Bahr, "and cleanse it in the dust. Put it forth, I say."

Ayoub obeyed him in fearful alacrity, whereupon Sakr-el-Bahr released his hold and allowed the unfortunate fellow to rise at last, half-choked with dirt, livid of face, and quaking like a jelly, an object of ridicule and cruel mockery to all assembled.

"Now get thee hence, ere my sea-hawks lay their talons on thee. Go!"

Ayoub departed in all haste to the increasing jeers of the multitude and the taunts of Tsamanni, whilst Sakr-el-Bahr turned him once more to the dalal.

"At one thousand and six hundred philips this slave is thine, O Sakr-el-Bahr, thou glory of Islam. May Allah increase thy victories!"

"Pay him, Ali," said the corsair shortly, and he advanced to receive his purchase.

Face to face stood he now with Rosamund, for the first time since that day before the encounter with the Dutch argosy when he had sought her in the cabin of the carack.

One swift glance she bestowed on him, then, her senses reeling with horror at her circumstance, she shrank back, her face of a deathly pallor. In his treatment of Ayoub she had just witnessed the lengths of brutality of which he was capable, and she was not to know that this brutality had been a deliberate piece of mummery calculated to strike terror into her.

Pondering her now he smiled a tight-lipped cruel smile that only served to increase her terror.

"Come," he said in English.

She cowered back against the dalal as if for protection. Sakr-el-Bahr reached forward, caught her by the wrists, and almost tossed her to his Nubians, Abiad and Zal-Zer, who were attending him.

"Cover her face," he bade them. "Bear her to my house. Away!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRUTH

THE sun was dipping swiftly to the world's rim when Sakr-el-Bahr with his Nubians and his little retinue of corsairs came to the gates of that white house of his on its little eminence outside the Bab-el-Oueb, and beyond the walls of the city.

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When Rosamund and Lionel, brought in the wake of the corsair, found themselves in the spacious courtyard beyond the dark and narrow entrance, the blue of the sky contained but the paling embers of the dying day, and suddenly, sharply upon the evening stillness, came a mueddin's voice calling the faithful unto prayer.

Slaves fetched water from the fountain that played in the middle of the quadrangle and tossed aloft a slender silvery spear of water to break into a myriad gems and so shower down into the broad marble basin. Sakr-el-Bahr washed, as did his followers, and then he went down upon the praying-mat that had been set for him, whilst his corsairs detached their cloaks and spread them upon the ground to serve them in like stead.

The Nubians turned the two slaves about, lest their glances should defile the orisons of the faithful, and left them so, facing the wall and the green gate that led into the garden whence were wafted on the cooling air the perfumes of jessamine and lavender. Through the laths of the gate they might have caught a glimpse of the riot of color there, and they might have seen the slaves arrested by the Persian waterwheel at which they had been toiling and chanting until the call to prayer had come to strike them into statues.

Sakr-el-Bahr rose from his devotions, uttered a sharp word of command, and entered the house. The Nubians followed him, urging their captives before them up the narrow stairs, and so brought them out upon the terrace on the roof, that space which in Eastern houses is devoted to the women, but which no woman's foot had ever trodden since this house had been tenanted by Sakr-el-Bahr the wifeless.

This terrace, which was surrounded by a parapet some four feet high, commanded a view of the city straggling up the hillside to eastward from the harbor and of the island at the end of the mole which had been so laboriously built by the labor of Christian slaves from the stones of the ruined fortress —the Peñon, which Kheyr-ed-Din Barbarossa had wrested from the Spaniards. The deepening shroud of evening was now upon all, transmuting white and yellow walls alike to a pearly grayness.

An awning supported upon two gigantic spears hung out from the southern wall of the terrace which rose to twice the height of that forming the parapet on its other three sides. Under this was a divan and silken cushions, and near it a small Moorish table of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold. Over the opposite parapet, where a lattice had been set, rioted a trailing rose-tree charged with blood-red blossoms, though now their colors were merged into the all-encompassing grayness.

Here Lionel and Rosamund looked at each other in the dim light, their faces gleaming ghostly each to each, whilst the Nubians stood like twin statues by the door that opened from the stair-head.

The man groaned, and clasped his hands before him. The doblet which had been torn from him in the *sôk* had since been restored and temporarily repaired by a strand of palmetto cord. But he was woefully bedraggled. Yet his thoughts, if his first words are to be taken as an indication of them, were for Rosamund's condition rather than his own.

"O God, that you should be subjected to this!" he cried. "That you should have suffered what you have suffered! The humiliation of it, the barbarous cruelty! Oh!" he covered his haggard face with his hands.

She touched him gently on the arm.

"What I have suffered is but a little thing," she said, and her voice was wonderfully steady and soothing. Have I not said that these Godolphins were brave folk? Even their women were held to have something of the male spirit in their breasts; and to this none can doubt that Rosamund now bore witness.

"Do not pity me, Lionel, for my sufferings are at an end or very nearly."

She smiled strangely, the smile of exaltation that you may see upon the martyr's face in the hour of doom.

"How?" quoth he, in faint surprize.

"How?" she echoed. "Is there not always a way to thrust aside life's burden when it grows too heavy—heavier than God would have us bear?"

His only answer was a groan. Indeed, he had done little but groan in all the hours they had spent together since they were brought ashore from the carack.

Slaves entered, bearing four enormous flaming torches, which they set in iron sconces protruding from the wall of the house. Thence they shed a lurid ruddy glow upon the terrace. The slaves departed again, and presently, in the black gap of the

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doorway between the Nubians a third figure appeared unheralded. It was Sakr-el-Bahr.

He stood a moment at gaze, his attitude haughty, his face expressionless; then slowly he advanced. He was dressed in a short white caftan that descended to his knees, and was caught about his waist in a shimmering girdle of gold that quivered like fire in the glow of the torches as he moved. His arms from the elbow and his legs from the knee were bare, and his feet were shod with gold-embroidered red Turkish slippers. He wore a white turban decked by a plume of osprey attached by a jewelled clasp.

He signed to the Nubians, and they vanished silently, leaving him alone with his captives.

He bowed to Rosamund.

"This, mistress," he said, "is to be your domain henceforth—which is to treat you more as wife than slave. For it is to Moslem wives that the house-tops in Barbary are allotted. I hope you like it."

Lionel staring at him out of a white face, his conscience bidding him fear the very worst, his imagination painting a thousand horrid fates for him and turning him sick with dread, shrank back before his half-brother, who scarce appeared to notice him just then.

But Rosamund confronted him, drawn to the full of her splendid height, and if her face was pale yet it was as composed and calm as his own; if her bosom rose and fell to betray her agitation, yet her glance was contemptuous and defiant, her voice calm and steady, when she answered him with the question—

"What is your intent with me?"

"My intent?" said he with a little twisted smile.

Yet for all that he believed he hated her and sought to hurt, to humble and to crush her, he could not stifle his admiration of her spirit's gallantry in such an hour as this.

"My intent is not for you to question," he replied. "There was a time, Rosamund, when in all the world you had no slave more utter than was I. Yourself in your heartlessness, and in your lack of faith you broke the golden fetters of that servitude. You'll find it less easy to break the shackles I now impose on you."

She smiled her scorn and quiet confidence. He stepped close to her.

"You are my slave, do you understand?—bought in the market-place as I might buy me a mule, a goat, or a camel—and belonging to me body and soul. You are my property, my thing, my chattel, to use or abuse, to cherish or break as suits my whim, without a will that is not my will, holding your very life at my good pleasure."

She recoiled a step before the dull hatred that throbbed in his words, before the evil mockery of his swarthy, bearded face.

"You beast!" she gasped.

"So now you understand the bondage into which you are come in exchange for the bondage which in your own wantonness you dissolved."

"May God forgive you," she panted.

"I thank you for that prayer," said he. "May He forgive you no less."

And then from the background came an inarticulate sound, a strangled, snarling sob from Lionel.

Sakr-el-Bahr turned slowly. He eyed the fellow a moment in silence, then he laughed.

"Ha! My sometime brother. A pretty fellow, as God lives, is it not? Consider him, Rosamund. Behold how gallantly misfortune is borne by this pillar of manhood upon which you would have leaned, by this stalwart husband of your choice. Look at him! Look at this dear brother of mine."

Under the lash of that mocking tongue Lionel's mood was stung to anger where before it had held naught but fear.

"You are no brother of mine," he retorted fiercely. "Your mother was a wanton who betrayed my father."

Sakr-el-Bahr quivered a moment as if he had been struck. Yet he controlled himself.

"Let me hear my mother's name but once again on thy foul tongue, and I'll have it ripped out by the roots. Her memory, I thank God, is far above the insults of such a crawling thing as you. None the less, take care not to speak of the only woman whose name I reverence."

And then, turning at bay, as even the rat will do, Lionel sprang upon him, with clawing hands outstretched to reach his throat. But Sakr-el-Bahr caught him in a grip that bent him howling to his knees.

"You find me strong, eh?" he gibed. "Is it matter for wonder? Consider that for six endless months I toiled at the oar of a galley, and you'll understand what it was that turned my body into iron and robbed me of a soul."

He flung him off, and sent him crashing

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into the rosebush and the lattice over which it rambled.

"Do you realize the horror of the rower's bench?—to sit day in day out, night in night out, chained naked to the oar, amid the reek and stench of your fellows in misfortune, unkempt, unwashed save by the rain, broiled and roasted by the sun, festering with sores, lashed and cut and scarred by the boatswain's whip as you faint under the ceaseless, endless cruel toil?

"Do you realize it?" From a tone of suppressed fury his voice rose suddenly to a roar. "You shall. For that horror which was mine by your contriving shall now be yours until you die."

He paused; but Lionel made no attempt to avail himself of this. His courage all gone out of him again, as suddenly as it had flickered up, he cowered where he had been flung.

"Before you go there is something else," Sakr-el-Bahr resumed, "something for which I have had you brought hither tonight.

"Not content with having delivered me to all this, not content with having branded me a murderer, destroyed my good name, filched my possessions and driven me into the very path of hell, you must further set about usurping my place in the false heart of this woman I once loved.

"I hope," he went on reflectively, "that in your own poor way you love her, too, Lionel. Thus to the torment that awaits your body shall be added torment for your treacherous soul—such torture of mind as only the damned may know. To that end I have brought you hither. That you may realize something of what is in store for this woman at my hands; that you may take the thought of it with you to be to your mind worse than the boatswain's lash to your pampered body."

"You devil!" snarled Lionel. "Oh, you fiend out of hell."

"If you will manufacture devils, little toad of a brother, do not upbraid them for being devils when next you meet them."

"Give him no heed, Lionel!" said Rosamund. "I shall prove him as much a boaster as he has proved himself a villain. Never think that he will be able to work his evil will."

"'Tis you are the boaster there," said Sakr-el-Bahr. "And for the rest, I am what you and he, between you, have made me."

"Did we make you liar and coward?—for that is what you are indeed," she answered.

"Coward?" he echoed, in genuine surprize. "'Twill be some lie that he has told you with the others. In what, pray, was I ever a coward?"

"In what? In this that you do now; in this taunting and torturing of two helpless beings in your power."

"I speak not of what I am," he replied, "for I have told you that I am what you have made me. I speak of what I was. I speak of the past."

She looked at him and she seemed to measure him with her unwavering glance.

"You speak of the past?" she echoed, her voice low. "You speak of the past and to me? You dare?"

"It is that we might speak of it together that I have fetched you all the way from England; that at last I may tell you things I was a fool to have kept from you five years ago; that we may resume a conversation which you interrupted when you dismissed me."

"I did you a monstrous injury, no doubt," she answered him, with bitter irony. "I was surely wanting in consideration. It would have become me better to have smiled and fawned upon my brother's murderer."

"I swore to you, then, that I was not his murderer," he reminded her in a voice that shook.

"And I answered you that you lied."

"Aye, and on that you dismissed me—the word of the man whom you professed to love, the word of the man to whom you had given your trust weighing for naught with you."

"When I gave you my trust," she retorted, "I did so in ignorance of your true self, in a headstrong wilful ignorance that would not be guided by what all the world said of you and your wild ways. For that blind wilfulness I have been punished, as perhaps I deserved to be."

"Lies—all lies!" he stormed. "Those ways of mine—and God knows they were none so wild, when all is said—I abandoned when I came to love you. No lover since the world began was ever so cleansed, so purified, so sanctified by love as was I."

"Spare me this at least!" she cried on a note of loathing.

"Spare you?" he echoed. "What shall I spare you?"

"The shame of it all; the shame that is

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ever mine in the reflection that for a season I believed I loved you."

He smiled.

"If you can still feel shame, it shall overwhelm you ere I have done. For you shall hear me out. Here there are none to interrupt us, none to thwart my sovereign will. Reflect then, and remember. Remember what a pride you took in the change you had wrought in me. Your vanity welcomed that flattery, that tribute to the power of your beauty. Yet, all in a moment, upon the paltriest grounds, you believed me the murderer of your brother."

"The paltriest grounds?" she cried, protesting almost despite herself.

"So paltry that the justices at Truro would not move against me."

"Because," she cut in, "they accounted that you had been sufficiently provoked. Because you had not sworn to them as you swore to me that no provocation should ever drive you to raise your hand against my brother. Because they did not realize how false and how forsworn you were."

He considered her a moment. Then he took a turn on the terrace. Lionel crouching ever by the rose-tree was almost entirely forgotten by him now.

"God give me patience with you!" he said at length. "I need it. For I desire you to understand many things this night. I mean you to see how just is my resentment; how just the punishment that is to overtake you for what you have made of my life and perhaps of my hereafter. Justice Baine and another who is dead, knew me for innocent."

"They knew you for innocent?" There was scornful amazement in her tone. "Were they not witnesses of the quarrel betwixt you and Peter and of your oath that you would kill him?"

"That was an oath sworn in the heat of anger. Afterwards I bethought me that he was your brother."

"Afterwards?" said she. "After you had murdered him?"

"I say again," Oliver replied calmly, "that I did not do this thing."

"And I say again that you lie."

He considered her for a long moment; then he laughed.

"Have you ever," he asked, "known a man to lie without some purpose? Men lie for the sake of profit, they lie out of cowardice or malice, or else because they are vain and vulgar boasters. I know of no other causes that will drive a man to falsehood, save that—ah yes!—" and he flashed a sidelong glance at Lionel—"save that sometimes a man will lie to shield another, out of self-sacrifice. There you have all the spurs that urge a man to falsehood. Can any of these be urging me tonight? Reflect! Ask yourself what purpose I could serve by lying to you now. Consider further that I have come to loathe you for your unfaith; that I desire naught so much as to punish you for that and for all its bitter consequences to me; that I have brought you hither to exact payment from you to the uttermost farthing. What end then can I serve by falsehood?"

"All this being so, what end could you serve by truth?" she countered.

"To make you realize to the full the injustice that you did. To make you understand the wrongs for which you are called to pay. To prevent you from conceiving yourself a martyr; to make you perceive in all its deadly bitterness that what now comes to you is the inevitable fruit of your own faithlessness."

"Sir Oliver, do you think me a fool?" she asked him.

"Madam, I do—and worse," he answered.

"Aye, that is clear," she agreed scornfully, "since even now you waste breath in attempting to persuade me against my reason. But words will not blot out facts. And though you talk from now till the Day of Judgment no word of yours can efface those bloodstains in the snow that formed a trail from that poor murdered body to your own door; no word of yours can extinguish the memory of the hatred between him and you, and of your own threat to kill him; nor can it stifle the recollection of the public voice demanding your punishment. What had you to set against all that, to convince me that your hands were clean, to induce me to keep the troth which—God forgive me!—I had plighted to you?"

"My word," he answered her in a ringing voice.

"Your lie," she amended.

"Do not suppose," said he, "that I could not support my word by proofs if called upon to do so."

"Proofs?" She stared at him, wide-eyed a moment. Then her lip curled.

"And that no doubt was the reason of your flight when you heard that the Queen's

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pursuivants were coming in response to the public voice to call you to account."

He stood at gaze a moment, utterly dumfounded.

"My flight?" he said. "What fable's that?"

"You will tell me next that you did not flee. That that is another false charge against you?"

"So," he said slowly, "it was believed I fled!"

AND then light burst upon him, to dazzle and stun him. It was so inevitably what must have been believed, and yet it had never crossed his mind. Oh the damnable simplicity of it! At another time his disappearance must have provoked comment and investigation, perhaps. But, happening when it did, the answer to it came promptly and convincingly, and no man troubled to question further. Thus was Lionel's task made doubly easy thus was his own guilt made doubly sure in the eyes of all.

His head sank upon his breast. What had he done? Could he still blame Rosamund for having been convinced by so overwhelming a piece of evidence? Could he still blame her if she had burned unopened the letter which he had sent her by the hand of Pitt? What else indeed could any suppose, but that he had fled? And that being so, clearly such a flight must brand him irrefutably for the murderer he was alleged to be. How could he blame her if she had ultimately been convinced by the only reasonable assumption possible?

A sudden sense of the wrong he had done rose now like a tide about him.

"My God!" He groaned, like a man in pain. "My God!"

"What else, indeed, could you believe?" he muttered brokenly, thus giving some utterance to what was passing through his mind.

"Naught else but the whole vile truth," she answered fiercely, and thereby stung him anew, whipped him out of his sudden weakening back to his mood of resentment and vindictiveness.

She had shown herself, he thought in that moment of reviving anger, too ready to believe what told against him.

"The truth?" he echoed, and eyed her boldly now. "Do you know the truth when you see it? We shall discover. For by God's light you shall have the truth laid stark before you now, and you shall find it hideous beyond all your hideous imaginings."

There was something so compelling now in his tone and manner that it drove her to realize that some revelation was impending. She was conscious of a faint excitement, a reflection perhaps of the wild excitement that was astir in him.

"Your brother," he began, "met his death at the hands of a false weakling whom I loved, towards whom I had a sacred duty. Straight from the deed he fled to me for shelter. . A wound he had taken in the struggle left that trail of blood to mark the way he had come."

He paused, and his tone became gentler, it assumed the level note of one who reasons impassively.

"Was it not an odd thing, now, that none should ever have paused to seek with certainty whence that blood proceeded, and to consider that I bore no wound in those days? Master Baine knew it, for I submitted my body to his examination, and a document was drawn up and duly attested which should have sent the Queen's pursuivants back to London with drooping tails had I been at Penarrow to receive them."

Faintly through her mind stirred the memory that Master Baine had urged the existence of some such document, that in fact he had gone so far as to have made oath of this very circumstance now urged by Sir Oliver; and she remembered that the matter had been brushed aside as an invention of the justice's to answer the charge of laxity in the performance of his duty, particularly as the only co-witness he could cite was Sir Andrew Flack, the parson, since deceased. Sir Oliver's voice drew her attention from that memory.

"But let that be," he was saying. "Let us come back to the story itself. I gave the craven weakling shelter. Thereby I drew down suspicion upon myself, and since I could not clear myself save by denouncing him, I kept silent. That suspicion grew to certainty when the woman to whom I was betrothed, recking nothing of my oaths, freely believing the very worst of me, made an end of our betrothal and thereby branded me a murderer and a liar in the eyes of all. Indignation swelled against me. The Queen's pursuivants were on their way to do what the justices of Truro refused to do.

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"So far I have given you facts. Now I give you surmise—my own conclusions—but surmise that strikes, as you shall judge, the very bull's-eye of truth. That dastard to whom I had given sanctuary, to whom I had served as a cloak, measured my nature by his own and feared that I must prove unequal to the fresh burden to be cast upon me. He feared lest under the strain of it I should speak out, advance my proofs, and so destroy him. There was the matter of that wound, and there was something still more unanswerable he feared I might have urged. There was a certain woman—a wanton up at Malpas—who could have been made to speak, who could have revealed a rivalry concerning her betwixt the slayer and your brother. For the affair in which Peter Godolphin met his death was a pitifully, shamefully sordid one at bottom."

For the first time she interrupted him, fiercely.

"Do you malign the dead?"

"Patience, mistress," he commanded. "I malign none. I speak the truth of a dead man that the truth may be known of two living ones. Hear me out, then! I have waited long and survived a deal that I might tell you this.

"That craven, then, conceived that I might become a danger to him; so he decided to remove me. He contrived to have me kidnaped one night and put aboard a vessel to be carried to Barbary and sold there as a slave. That is the truth of my disappearance. And the slayer, whom I had befriended and sheltered at my own bitter cost, profited yet further by my removal. God knows whether the prospect of such profit was further temptation to him. In time he came to succeed me in my possessions, and at last to succeed me even in the affections of the faithless woman who once had been my affianced wife."

At last she started from the frozen patience in which she had listened hitherto.

"Do you say that—that Lionel—?" she was beginning in a voice choked by indignation.

And then Lionel spoke at last, straightening himself into a stiffly upright attitude.

"He lies!" he cried. "He lies, Rosamund! Do not heed him."

"I do not," she answered, turning away.

A wave of color suffused the swarthy face of Sakr-el-Bahr. A moment his eyes followed her as she moved away a step or two, then they turned their blazing light of anger upon Lionel. He strode silently across to him, his mien so menacing that Lionel shrank back in fresh terror.

Sakr-el-Bahr caught his brother's wrist in a grip that was as that of a steel manacle.

"We'll have the truth this night if we have to tear it from you with red-hot pincers," he said between his teeth.

He dragged him forward to the middle of the terraces and held him there before Rosamund, forcing him down upon his knees into a cowering attitude by the violence of that grip upon his wrist.

"Do you know aught of the ingenuity of Moorish torture?" he asked him. "You may have heard of the rack and the wheel and the thumbscrew at home. They are instruments of voluptuous delight compared with the contrivances of Barbary to loosen stubborn tongues."

White and tense, her hands clenched, Rosamund seemed to stiffen before him.

"You coward! You cur! You craven renegade dog!" she branded him.

Oliver released his brother's wrist and beat his hands together. Without heeding Rosamund he looked down upon Lionel, who cowered shuddering at his feet.

"What do you say to a match between your fingers? Or do you think a pair of bracelets of living fire would answer better, to begin with?"

A squat, sandy-bearded, turbaned fellow, rolling slightly in his gait, came—as had been prearranged—to answer the corsair's summons.

With the toe of his slipper Sakr-el-Bahr stirred his brother.

"Look up, dog," he bade him. "Consider me that man, and see if you know him again. Look at him, I say!"

And Lionel looked, yet since clearly he did so without recognition, his brother explained:

"His name among Christians was Jasper Leigh. He was the skipper you bribed to carry me into Barbary. He was taken in his own toils when his ship was sunk by Spaniards. Later he fell into my power, and because I forebore from hanging him he is today my faithful follower. I should bid him tell you what he knows," he continued, turning to Rosamund, "if I thought you would believe his tale. But since I am assured you would not, I will take other means."

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He swung round to Jasper again.

"Bid Ali heat me a pair of steel manacles in a brazier and hold them in readiness against my need of them." And he waved his hand.

Jasper bowed and vanished.

"The bracelets shall coax confession from your own lips, my brother."

'I have naught to confess," protested Lionel. "You may force lies from me with your ruffianly tortures."

Oliver smiled.

"Not a doubt but that lies will flow from you more readily than truth. But we shall have truth, too, in the end, never doubt it."

He was mocking, and there was a subtle purpose underlying his mockery.

"And you shall tell a full story," he continued, "in all its details, so that Mistress Rosamund's last doubt shall vanish. You shall tell her how you lay in wait for him that evening in Godolphin Park; how you took him unawares, and——"

"That is false!" cried Lionel in a passion of sincerity that brought him to his feet.

It was false, indeed, and Oliver knew it, and deliberately had recourse to falsehood, using it as a fulcrum upon which to lever out the truth.

"False?" he cried with scorn. "Come, now, be reasonable. The truth, ere torture sucks it out of you. Reflect that I know all —exactly as you told it me. How was it, now? Lurking behind a bush you sprang upon him unawares and ran him through before he could so much as lay a hand to his sword, and so——"

"The lie of that is proven by the very facts themselves," was the furious interruption.

A subtle judge of tones might have realized that here was truth indeed, angry indignant truth that compelled conviction.

"His sword lay beside him when they found him."

But Oliver was loftily disdainful.

"Do I not know? Yourself you drew it after you had slain him."

The taunt performed its deadly work. For just one instant Lionel was carried off his feet by the luxury of his genuine indignation, and in that one instant he was lost.

"As God's my witness, that is false!" he cried wildly. "And you know it. I fought him fair——"

He checked on a long, shuddering, indrawn breath that was horrible to hear.

Then silence followed, all three remaining motionless as statues: Rosamund white and tense, Oliver grim and sardonic, Lionel limp, and overwhelmed by the consciousness of how he had been lured into self-betrayal.

At last it was Rosamund who spoke, and her voice shook and shifted from key to key despite her strained attempt to keep it level.

"What—what did you say, Lionel?" she asked.

Oliver laughed softly.

"He was about to add proof of his statement, I think," he jeered. "He was about to mention the wound he took in that fight, which left those tracks in the snow, thus to prove that I lied—as indeed I did—when I said that he took Peter unawares."

"Lionel!" she cried.

She advanced a step and made as if to hold out her arms to him, then let them fall again beside her. He stood stricken, answering nothing.

"Lionel!" she cried again, her voice growing suddenly shrill. "Is this true?"

"Did you not hear him say it?" quoth Oliver.

She stood swaying a moment, looking at Lionel, her white face distorted into a mask of unutterable pain. Oliver stepped towards her, ready to support her, fearing that she was about to fall. But with an imperious hand she checked his advance, and by a supreme effort controlled her weakness. Yet her knees shook under her, refusing their office. She sank down upon the divan and covered her face with her hands.

"God pity me!" she moaned, and sat huddled there, shaken with sobs.

Lionel started at that heart-broken cry. Cowering, he approached her, and Oliver, grim and sardonic, stood back, a spectator of the scene he had precipitated. He knew that given rope Lionel would enmesh himself still further. There must be explanations that would damn him utterly. Oliver was well content to look on.

"Rosamund!" came Lionel's piteous cry. "Rose! Have mercy! Listen ere you judge me. Listen lest you misjudge me!"

"Aye, listen to him," Oliver flung in, with his soft, hateful laugh. "Listen to him. I doubt he'll be vastly entertaining."

That sneer was a spur to the wretched Lionel.

"Rosamund, all that he has told you of it

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is false. I—I— It was done in self-defense. It is a lie that I took him unawares." His words came wildly now. "We had quarrelled about—about—a certain matter, and as the devil would have it we met that evening in Godolphin Park, he and I. He taunted me; he struck me, and finally he drew upon me and forced me to draw that I might defend my life. That is the truth. I swear to you here on my knees in the sight of Heaven! And——"

"Enough, sir! Enough!" she broke in, controlling herself to check these protests that but heightened her disgust.

"Nay, hear me yet, I implore you; that knowing all you may be merciful in your judgment."

"Merciful?" she cried, and almost seemed to laugh.

"It was an accident that I slew him," Lionel raved on. "I never meant it. I never meant to do more than ward and preserve my life. But when swords are crossed more may happen than a man intends. I take God to witness that his death was an accident resulting from his own fury."

She had checked her sobs, and she considered him now with eyes that were hard and terrible.

"Was it also an accident that you left me and all the world in the belief that the deed was your brother's?" she asked him.

He covered his face, as if unable to endure her glance.

"Did you but know how I loved you—even in those days, in secret—you would perhaps pity me a little," he whimpered.

"Pity?"

She leaned forward and seemed to spit the word at him.

"'Sdeath, man! Do you sue for pity—you?"

"Yet you must pity me did you know the greatness of the temptation to which I succumbed."

"I know the greatness of your infamy, of your falseness, of your cowardice, of your baseness. Oh!"

He stretched out suppliant hands to her; there were tears now in his eyes.

"Of your charity, Rosamund—" he was beginning, when at last Oliver intervened.

"I think you are wearying the lady," he said, and stirred him with his foot. "Relate to us instead some more of your astounding accidents. They are more diverting. Elucidate the accident by which you had me kidnaped to be sold into slavery. Tell us of the accident by which you succeeded to my property. Expound to the full the accidental circumstances of which throughout you have been the unfortunate victim. Come, man, ply your wits. 'Twill make a pretty tale."

And then came Jasper to announce that Ali waited with the brazier and the heated manacles.

"They are no longer needed," said Oliver. "Take this slave hence with you. Bid Ali to take charge of him, and at dawn to see him chained to one of the oars of my galeasse. Away with him."

Lionel rose to his feet, his face ashen.

"Wait! Ah, wait! Rosamund!" he cried.

Oliver caught him by the nape of his neck, span him round and flung him into the arms of Jasper.

"Take him away!" he growled, and Jasper took the wretch by the shoulders and urged him out, leaving Rosamund and Oliver alone with the truth under the stars of Barbary.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SUBTLETY OF FENZILEH

OLIVER considered the woman for a long moment as she sat half-crouching on the divan, her hands locked, her face set and stony, her eyes lowered. He sighed gently and turned away.

Now that truth had been dragged from its well, and tossed, as it were, into Rosamund's lap, he felt none of the fierce exultation which he had conceived that such an hour as this must bring him. Rather, indeed, was he saddened and oppressed. To poison the unholy cup of joy which he had imagined himself draining with such thirsty zest there was that discovery of a measure of justification for her attitude towards him in her conviction that his disappearance was explained by flight.

He was weighted down by a sense that he had put himself entirely in the wrong; that in his vengeance he had overreached himself; and he found the fruits of it, which had seemed so desirably luscious, turning to ashes in his mouth.

Long he stood there, the silence between them entirely unbroken. Then at length he stirred, turned from the parapet, and paced slowly back until he came to stand beside the divan, looking down upon her from his great height.

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"At last you have heard the truth," he said. And as she made no answer he continued:

"I am thankful it was surprized out of him before the torture was applied, else you might have concluded that pain was wringing a false confession from him."

He paused, but still she did not speak; indeed, she made no sign that she had heard him.

"That," he concluded, "was the man whom you preferred to me. Faith, you did not flatter me, as perhaps you may have learnt."

At last she was moved from her silence, and her voice came dull and hard.

"I have learnt how little there is to choose between you," she said. "It was to have been expected. I might have known that two brothers could not have been so dissimilar in nature. Oh, I am learning a deal, and swiftly!"

"You are learning?" he echoed. "What are you learning?"

"Knowledge of the ways of men."

His teeth gleamed in his wry smile.

"I hope the knowledge will bring you as much bitterness as the knowledge of women —of one woman—has brought me. To have believed me what you believed me—me whom you conceived yourself to love!"

"If I have a mercy to beg of you it is that you will not shame me with the reminder."

"Of your faithlessness?" he asked. "Of your disloyal readiness to believe the worst evil of me?"

"Of my ever having believed that I loved you. That is the thought that shames me, as nothing else in life could shame me, as not even the slave-market and all the insult to which you have submitted me could shame me. You taunt me with my readiness to believe evil of you——"

"I do more than taunt you with it," he broke in, his anger mounting under the pitiless lash of her scorn. "I lay to your charge the wasted years of my life, all the evil that has followed out of it, all that I have suffered, all that I have lost, all that I am become."

She looked up at him coldly, astonishingly mistress of herself.

"You lay all this to my charge?" she asked him.

"I do." He was very vehement. "Had you not used me as you did, had you not lent a ready ear to lies, that whelp my brother would never have gone to such lengths, nor should I ever have afforded him the opportunity."

She shifted on the cushions of the divan and turned her shoulder to him.

"All this is very idle," she said coldly.

Yet perhaps because she felt that she had need to justify herself she continued:

"If, after all, I was so ready to believe evil of you, it is that my instincts must have warned me of the evil that was ever in you. You have proved to me tonight that it was not you who murdered Peter; but to attain that proof you have done a deed that is even fouler and more shameful, a deed that reveals to the full the blackness of your heart. Have you not proved yourself a monster of vengeance and impiety?"

She rose and faced him again in her sudden passion.

"Are you not—you that were born a Cornish Christian gentleman—become a heathen and a robber, a renegade and a pirate? Have you not sacrificed your very God to your vengeful lust?"

He met her glance fully, never quailing before her denunciation, and when she had ended on that note of question he counter-questioned her.

"And your instincts had forewarned you of all this? God's life, woman! Can you invent no better tale than that?"

He turned aside as two slaves entered bearing an earthenware vessel.

"Here comes your supper. I hope your appetite is keener than your logic."

They set the vessel, from which a savory smell proceeded, upon the little Moorish table by the divan. On the ground beside it they placed a broad dish of baked earth in which there were a couple of loaves and a red, short-necked amphora of water with a drinking-cup placed over the mouth of it to act as a stopper.

They salaamed profoundly and padded softly out again.

"Sup," he bade her shortly.

"I want no supper," she replied, her manner sullen.

His cold eye played over her.

"Henceforth, girl, you will consider not what you want, but what I bid you do. I bid you eat; about it, therefore."

"I will not."

"Will not?" he echoed slowly. "Is that a speech from slave to master? Eat, I say."

"I can not! I can not!" she protested.

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"A slave may not live who can not do her master's bidding."

"Then kill me," she answered fiercely, leaping up to confront and dare him. "Kill me. You are used to killing, and for that at least I should be grateful."

"I will kill you if I please," he said in level, icy tones. "But not to please you. You don't yet understand. You are my slave, my thing, my property, and I will not suffer you to be damaged save at my own good pleasure. Therefore, eat, or my Nubians shall whip you to quicken appetite."

For a moment she stood defiant before him, white and resolute. Then quite suddenly, as if her will was being bent and crumpled under the insistent pressure of his own, she drooped and sank down again to the divan. Slowly, reluctantly she drew the dish nearer. Watching her, he laughed quite silently.

She paused, appearing to seek for something. Failing to find it she looked up at him again, between scorn and intercession.

"Am I to tear the meat with my fingers?" she demanded.

His eyes gleamed with understanding, or at least with suspicion. But he answered her quite calmly:

"It is against the Prophet's law to defile meat or bread by the contact of a knife. You must use the hands that God has given you."

"Do you mock me with the Prophet and his laws? What are the Prophet's laws to me? If eat I must, at least I will not eat like a heathen dog, but in Christian fashion."

To indulge her, as it seemed, he slowly drew the richly hilted dagger from his girdle.

"Let that serve you, then," he said; and carelessly tossed it down beside her.

With a quick indrawn breath she pounced upon it.

"At last," she said, "you give me something for which I can be grateful to you." And on the words she laid the point of it against her breast.

Like lightning he had dropped to one knee, and his hand had closed about her wrist with such a grip that all her arm felt limp and powerless. He was smiling into her eyes, his swarthy face close to her own.

"Did you indeed suppose I trusted you? Did you really think me deceived by your sudden pretense of yielding? When will you learn that I am not a fool? I did it but to test your spirit."

"Then now you know its temper," she replied. "You know my intention."

"Forewarned, forearmed," said he.

She looked at him, with something that would have been mockery but for the contempt that colored it too deeply.

"Is it so difficult a thing," she asked, "to snap the thread of life? Are there no ways of dying save by the knife? You boast yourself my master; that I am your slave; that having bought me in the market-place I belong to you body and soul. How idle is that boast. My body you may bind and confine; but my soul— Be very sure that you shall be cheated of your bargain. You boast yourself lord of life and death. A lie! Death is all that you can command."

Quick steps came pattering up the stairs, and before he could answer her, before he had thought of words in which to do so, Ali confronted him with the astounding announcement that there was a woman below asking urgently to speak with him.

"A woman?" he questioned, frowning. "A Nasrani woman, do you mean?"

"No, my lord. A Moslem," was the still more surprizing information.

"A Moslem woman, here? Impossible!"

But even as he spoke a dark figure glided like a shadow across the threshold on to the terrace. She was in black from head to foot, including the veil that shrouded her, a veil of the proportions of a mantle, serving to dissemble her very shape.

Ali swung upon her in a rage.

"Did I not bid thee wait below, thou daughter of shame?" he stormed. "She has followed me up, my lord, to thrust herself in here upon you. Shall I drive her forth?"

"Let her be," said Sakr-el-Bahr. And he waved Ali away. "Leave us!"

Something about that black immovable figure arrested his attention and fired his suspicions. Unaccountably almost it brought to his mind the thought of Ayoub-el-Samin and the bidding there had been for Rosamund in the *sôk*.

He stood waiting for his visitor to speak and disclose herself. She on her side continued immovable until Ali's footsteps had faded in the distance. Then with a boldness entirely characteristic, with the recklessness that betrayed her European origin intolerant of the Moslem restraint imposed upon her sex, she did what no True-believing woman would have done. She tossed back that long, black veil and disclosed the

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pale countenance and languorous eyes of Fenzileh.

For all that it was no more than he had expected, yet upon beholding her—her countenance thus bared to his regard—he recoiled a step.

"Fenzileh!" he cried. "What madness is this?"

Having announced herself in that dramatic fashion she composedly readjusted her veil so that her countenance should once more be decently concealed.

"To come here, to my house, and thus!" he protested. "Should this reach the ears of thy lord, how will it fare with thee and with me? Away, woman, and at once!" he bade her.

"No need to fear his knowing of this unless, thyself, thou tell him," she answered. 'To thee I need no excuse if thou'lt but remember that like thyself I was not born a Moslem."

"But Algiers is not thy native Sicily, and whatever thou wast born it were well to remember what thou art become."

He went on at length to tell her of the precise degree of her folly, but she cut in, stemming his protestations in full flow.

"These are idle words that but delay me."

"To thy purpose then, in Allah's name, that thus thou mayest depart the sooner."

She came to it straight enough on that uncompromising summons. She pointed to Rosamund.

"It concerns that slave," she said. "I sent my wazeer to the *sôk* to-day with orders to purchase her for me."

"So I had supposed," he said.

"But it seems that she caught thy fancy, and the fool suffered himself to be outbidden."

"Well?"

"Thou'lt relinquish her to me at the price she cost thee?" A faint note of anxiety trembled in her voice.

"I am anguished to deny thee, O Fenzileh. She is not for sale."

"Ah, wait," she cried. "The price paid was high—many times higher than I have ever heard tell was given for a slave, however lovely. Yet I covet her. 'Tis a whim of mine, and I can not suffer to be thwarted in my whims. To gratify this one I will pay three thousand philips."

He looked at her and wondered what devilries might be stirring in her mind, what evil purpose she desired to serve.

"Thou'lt pay three thousand philips?" he said slowly. Then bluntly asked her—

"Why?"

"To gratify a whim, to please a fancy."

"What is the nature of this costly whim?" he insisted.

"The desire to possess her for my own," she answered evasively.

"And this desire to possess her, whence is it sprung?" he returned, as patient as he was relentless.

"You ask too many questions," she exclaimed with a flash of anger.

He shrugged and smiled.

"You answer too few."

"In a word, Oliver-Reis," said she, "wilt sell her for three thousand philips?"

"In a word—no," he answered her.

"Thou'lt not? Not for three thousand philips?" Her voice was charged with surprize, and he wondered was it real or assumed.

"Not for thirty thousand," answered he. "She is mine, and I'll not relinquish her. So since I have proclaimed my mind, and since to tarry here is fraught with peril for us both, I beg thee to depart."

There fell a little pause, and neither of them noticed the alert interest stamped upon the white face of Rosamund. Neither of them suspected her knowledge of French which enabled her to follow most of what was said in the *lingua franca* they employed.

Fenzileh drew close to him.

"Thou'lt not relinquish her, eh?" she asked, and he was sure she sneered. "Be not so confident. Thou'lt be forced to it, my friend—if not to me, why, then, to Asad. He is coming for her, himself, in person."

"Asad?" he cried, startled now.

"Asad-ed-Din," she answered, and upon that resumed her pleading. "Come, then! It were surely better to make a good bargain with me than a bad one with the Basha."

He shook his head and planted his feet squarely.

"I intend to make no bargain with either of you. This slave is not for sale."

"Shalt thou dare resist Asad? I tell thee he will take her whether she be for sale or not."

"I see," he said, his eyes narrowing. "And the fear of this, then, is the source of thy whim to acquire her for thyself. 'Thou art not subtle, O Fenzileh. The consciousness that thine own charms are fading sets thee trembling lest so much loveliness should entirely cast thee from thy lord's regard, eh?"

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If he could not see her face, and study there the effect of that thrust of his, at least he observed the quiver that ran through her muffled figure, he caught the note of anger that throbbed in her reply—

"And if that were so, what is't to thee?"

"It may be much or little," he replied.

"Indeed, it should be much," she answered quickly, breathlessly. "Have I not ever been thy friend? Have I not ever urged thy valor on my lord's notice and wrought like a true friend for thine advancement, Sakr-el-Bahr?"

He laughed outright.

"Laugh as thou will, but it is true," she insisted. "Lose me and thy most valuable ally is lost. For look, Sakr-el-Bahr, it is what would befall if another came to fill my place, another who might poison Asad's mind with lies against thee—for surely she can not love thee, this Frankish girl whom thou hast torn from her home!"

"Be not concerned for that," he answered lightly. "This slave of mine shall never usurp thy place beside Asad."

"O fool, Asad will take her whether she be for sale or not."

"If he can take her from me, the more easily can he take her from thee. No doubt thou hast considered that, and in some dark Sicilian way considered too how to provide against it. But the cost—hast thou counted that? What will Asad say to thee when he learns how thou hast thwarted him?"

"What do I care for that?" she cried in sudden fury, her gestures becoming a little wild. "She will be at the bottom of the harbor by then with a stone about her neck. He may have me whipped. No doubt he will. But 'twill end there. He will require me to console him for his loss, and so all will be well again."

At last he had drawn her, pumped her dry as he imagined. Indeed, indeed, he thought, he had been right to say she was not subtle. He had been a fool to have permitted himself to be intrigued by so shallow, so obvious a purpose.

"Depart in peace, O Fenzileh," he said. "I yield her to none."

His tone was final, and her answer seemed to accept at last his determination. Yet she was very quick with that answer; so quick that he might have suspected it to be preconceived.

"Then it is surely thine intent to wed her." No voice could have been more innocent and guileless than was hers now.

"If so," she went on, "it were best done quickly, for marriage is the only barrier Asad will not overthrow. He is devout, and out of his deep reverence for the Prophet's law he would be sure to respect such a bond as that. But be very sure that he will respect nothing short of it."

"And thy purpose would be equally well-served, eh?" he questioned her, sly in his turn.

"Equally," she admitted.

"Say 'better,' Fenzileh," he rejoined. "I said thou art not subtle. By the Koran, I lied. Thou art subtle as the serpent. Yet I see whither thou art gliding. Were I to be guided by thine advice a twofold purpose would be served. First, I should place her beyond Asad's reach, and second, I should be embroiled with him for having done so. What could more completely satisfy thy wishes?"

"Thou dost me wrong," she protested. "I am thy friend. I would that——"

She broke off suddenly to listen. The stillness of the night was broken by cries from the direction of the Bab-el-Oueb. She ran swiftly to the parapet whence the gate was to be seen and leaned far out.

"Look, look!" she cried, and there was a tremor of fear in her voice. "It is he—Asad-ed-Din."

Sakr-el-Bahr crossed to her side and in a glare of torches saw a body of men coming forth from the black archway of the gate.

"It seems as if, departing from thy custom, thou hast spoken truth, O Fenzileh."

She faced him, and he suspected the venomous glance darted at him through her veil. Yet her voice was cold.

"In a moment thou'lt have no single doubt of it. But what of me? He must not find me here. He would kill me, I think."

"I am sure he would," Sakr-el-Bahr agreed. "Yet muffled thus, who should recognize thee? Away, then, ere he comes. Dids't thou come alone?"

"Should I trust any one with the knowledge that I had visited thee?" she asked.

She moved quickly to the door, to pause again on the threshold.

"Thou'lt not relinquish her? Thou'lt not——"

"Be at ease," he answered her on so resolved a note that she departed satisfied.

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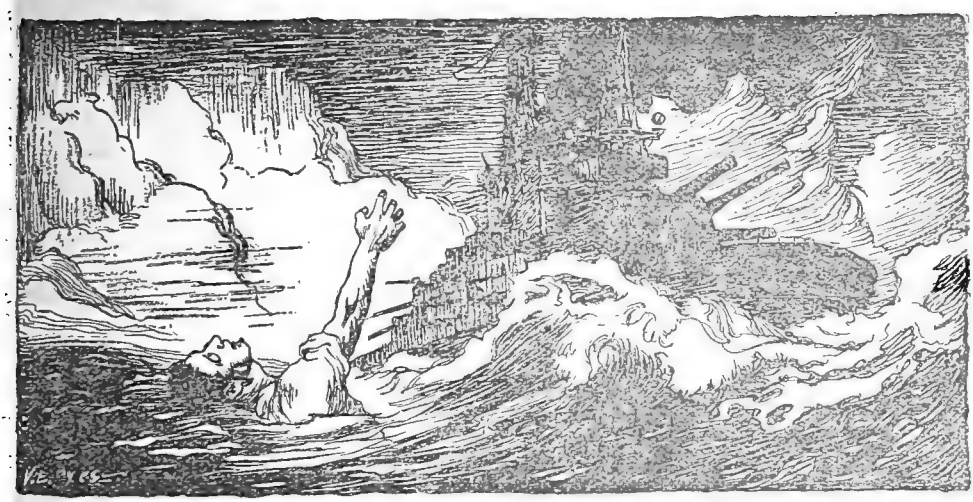

THE BOOT

by Lloyd Kohler

Author of "Snappy's Promotion," "The Court-Martial Maniac," etc.

THE Virginia Capes had blurred into the leaden horizon five hours before, and now the monstrous, gray battleship *Cuba* was umbering through ever rising seas, her great clipper nose pointing southward. The sky above was heavily overcast, while on the southeast horizon an ominous bluish-black bank of clouds foretold yet higher seas. Somewhere to the westward was Hatteras, armed with her dread Diamond Shoals, alert and yawning when the seas run high for fresh victims—helpless, ill-fated ships.

On the dreadnaught's boat-deck, grasping the life-line tightly to retain his balance on that giddy, rolling deck, and gazing for the hundredth time toward that sector of the horizon where the last of the land promontory had disappeared, stood a pale-faced, bleary-eyed, sea-sick youth. The boy—for he was scarcely more than a boy—was "Boots," the boot of the *Cuba's* third division.

Boots was the latest addition to the ship's company. He had come aboard only a week before, and the *Cuba* was his first sea-going ship. In the vernacular of the fleet a "boot" is one who is as yet unseasoned to the salt, as it were; a recruit who has yet to learn the ropes. Therefore Boots was—Boots. And indeed, as he was the rubberiest of rubber boots, he was sure to retain the disagreeable nickname until he could somehow redeem himself, in the eyes of his division, or until a fresher, greener, more rubbery boot was tossed aboard.

As they rounded the capes Boots had been certain that the water was a pale green color, but now, as if changed suddenly by Neptune's wand, it was unmistakably blue. At first he had supposed it to be a trick of his non-seafaring eyes. But he wanted to be sure, and so an hour before he had plucked up a parcel of nerve and asked a shipmate for the reason. The answer he got was both sarcastic and unconvincing.

"Yuh pore boot," the seaman had flung in reply, "any ass knows the seas is blue."

"Yes, but the Chesapeake was green," the wondering youth had retaliated limply.

"Yuh got lots to learn about water," the seaman had glared in return. "Listen t' me, duckling. Bays an' rivers an' cricks is mostly green, like yurself. Mudholes is black, an New York harbor's got the complexion of smackin' good beer. But the seas, kid—the seas is blue."

Such answers Boots had learned to expect. No boot, in the opinion of the average seaman, rates much consideration. He could only wait, hope, grin and bear, until he should pass the rubbery stage and emerge a salt.

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Below on the quarter-deck, Mitchell, the gaunt, wan-faced and snowy-haired boatswain's mate was profanely directing half a dozen bare-footed seamen who were hurriedly rigging ship for heavier weather. In a group they lowered the heavy steel hatches, first the starboard and then the port. Lastly they lowered the admiral's hatch midway between the two, but farther astern. The boot could hear distinctly the boatswain's mate's sharp voice bellowing orders to his men, as, two to a hatch, they dogged them down securely.

Mechanically Boots edged around the life-belt locker, keeping it between him and the men on the quarter-deck below; for he had no desire to be discovered. He had been assigned to the quarter-deck division, and he knew all too well that his place at that very moment was among the half-dozen seamen who were hurriedly rigging the quarter-deck for sea. But Boots had not yet developed his sea-legs, and he feared to trust himself on that wet, slippery and rolling deck. And as this was his first taste of real rough weather he concluded that his head was swimming too dizzily and his knees far too weak and wabbly to attempt to cast his lot with the experienced seamen in this condition.

And then there was Mitchell—gaunt, bloodless-cheeked, hatchet-faced Mitchell—rarely on speaking terms with the world even when the sea was peaceful, and in a blow as unreasonable as the fury-driven seas themselves.

Boots was vaguely aware that Mitchell, the boatswain's mate, had been scouring the decks for him for the last two hours, but he was too sick and discouraged to care. He decided to keep clear of all officers and petty officers until morning, when he might feel safe to trust his legs and perhaps even his stomach. Undoubtedly before dawn he could think up some explanation for his conduct.

The mate and his gang had left the quarter-deck before he again ventured into the open. The seas were running higher now, and every fifth or sixth wave was breaking over the quarter-deck. The quarter-deck life-buoy sentry had already abandoned his post.

For some minutes, with a strange feeling of awe, Boots watched the great propellers rising high out of the sea with every pitch of the ship, watched them sink far below the surface the next moment, only to rise again with the next sudden, terrific plunge. It reminded Boots of his own life, forever rising, forever falling, and, boy-like, he wondered if it typified the experiences of all men.

As the fury of the storm increased the eternal pitching was accompanied by a sickening rolling motion as the monster ship wallowed in the trough of the seas. And with this rolling motion came an unpleasant sensation to the uninitiated neophyte. His interest in things about him was cut short by a salty something which came up into his throat and threatened to strangle him. Only half-realizing the symptoms, he had barely time to reach a scupper before losing the bulk of his dinner. Within his stomach a fierce revolution was taking place, promising another eruption for the benefit of the finny tribes of the deep.

Boots looked about him quickly for a spot to lie down, but his decision was temporarily abandoned as a commanding voice on the other side of the locker boomed above the heavy wind. He listened attentively, one hand cupping an ear from the wind, the other resting soothingly over the pit of his rebellious stomach. It was the junior officer of the deck speaking; he was giving special orders to the sentry on the gasoline post. Part of the order was drowned by the wind, but the rest came quite distinctly.

"—and don't allow anybody to go down either of these two ladders near your post to the quarter-deck or the galleries. About every other wave is breaking over now and if a man is washed by the board tonight he's a goner. It would be folly to put a boat over the side tonight. We won't risk a whole life-boat's crew for one man."

"I'll bet the life-boat's crew on watch ain't sorry," the sentry ventured.

"No, and I don't blame them," the officer returned. "But that's the straight dope, so it's up to you sentries to see that no sailor gets on the weather-decks. The Old Man was talking to the navigator a few minutes ago, and I heard him say that if a man went overboard tonight the only chance he'd have of getting back aboard would be for the same sea that took him off to toss him back aboard. In other words, he'd be a goner."

The sentry laughed grimly.

"Goner is right. Whoever heard of——"

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"Of a man goin' overboard and being washed back aboard by the same wave?" the young ensign finished shortly. "Well, the skipper claimed that he'd heard of such a case twice—both times on merchant vessels, he said—and that it was possible, but even the navigator seemed skeptical. Yes, it's a chance in a trillion, I'd say, so keep your lamps trimmed tonight and watch those ladders to the weather-decks."

"Aye, aye, sir!" the sentry answered, and then for a time the voices were drowned by the increasing fury of the gale.

Boots, feeling a trifle better now, strained his hand-sheltered ear in an effort to catch more of the conversation. In another moment the voices reached him again; for the moment startlingly plain. It was the sentry who was speaking.

"—and say, Mr. Meeker, if you see the corp'ril of the guard, tell him to rush along that pot of good, black gemok. I'm afraid I'm gettin' a little purple in the gills."

The ensign laughed.

"Thought you were past that stage, Blackie."

"I thought so myself," the seaman answered, "but tonight's an exception, you know."

"Guess you're right, Blackie. Tonight is a corker and getting steadily worse. I remember my first cruise, and I pity that new bird. Have you seen the boot lately?"

"No sir, but Whitey Mitchell is looking for him. Says if he finds him he'll make a sailor out of him before this storm is over."

"Mitchell is far too hard on the new lads," the ensign declared. "He's a good deal too much of a bully; he belongs on a hell-ship, not a battleship. Do you think it's true—the story of him throwing a coxswain overboard during a storm while he was attached to a destroyer?"

"I don't know, sir, but I don't put anything past *him*. It was all circumstantial evidence, but sometimes that sort of evidence is pretty conclusive. Mitchell was court-martialed for it, but was cleared. The poor coxswain wasn't there to tell his story. That's all I know of it."

"It's too bad," the ensign concluded. "Well, keep a sharp look-out tonight and watch those ladders. Goodnight, Blackie."

Boots stepped farther into the shadows as the ensign passed close by on his way to the bridge, and when the officer was safely by he followed slowly. He was still hopelessly sick, and his only thought, for the moment, was to find a likely spot where he could lie down and be unmolested.

Midships, under cover of a great circular shield which surrounded the base of the giant smoke-stacks, he sighted a pile of old tarpaulin. He investigated. The tarpaulin was lying upon one of the engine-room dope-hatches, and had evidently been placed there by some sailor for sleeping purposes. It was an ideal spot, protected from the elements and safe from observation. Boots lay down and covered himself with the warm tarpaulin with a feeling of rare security. The hot air which sifted up from the engine-room was comforting—a sharp contrast to his frame of mind.

For some time Boots lay still and meditated; the words which he had just overheard between the officer and sentry passing through his mind with startling vividness. Although he had been aboard but a few days he had already heard the story of the coxswain who had disappeared during a storm, and Mitchell's connection with the tale. Among the older seamen the subject, whenever mentioned, was always dismissed with a knowing shake of the head, for Mitchell was regarded as one of the biggest brutes in the fleet.

Lying amidships, where the roll and pitch of a vessel is felt least, and where the air is fresh and vigorous, often has an amazing effect upon one who is experiencing his first brush with seasickness. It had that effect upon Boots. He felt surprizingly better now, and lay musing over the tales he had heard of the inhuman Mitchell, who was beyond doubt looking for him even then.

The sound of a boatswain's call piping "mess gear" brought Boots back to earth, and snapped him ungraciously from his meditations. He knew that his stomach would not welcome food in its present condition, but he longed for a cup of strong coffee. A moment he reflected, and then acting on a sudden decision he started for the main-deck and the coffee.

As he walked along the boat-deck toward the hatch leading to the main-deck, he noted that the seas were running even higher. At the same time the old feeling of sick helplessness returned to him, and he stumbled along drunkenly, catching at ventilators and at the sides of the small boats which he passed to retain his balance. Half-way down the ladder the salty taste

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returned in his throat and as he reached the bottom of the ladder, unable to retain it longer, the remainder of his dinner was deposited on the steel deck.

An instant he groped blindly in the darkness, endeavoring to keep his footing and master his helplessness. His condition hardly prepared him for what followed. Without warning a swift, cruel blow on the left cheek mercilessly felled him. He got to his knees dizzily, but before he could rise farther a terrific blow to the mouth stretched his length along the deck, the back of his head striking the steel hammock-netting with a dull thud. He lay still, half-unconscious, the blood trickling between his lips. From out of the murky darkness came the voice of Mitchell, sneering, brutally derisive:

"Yuh dirty pup!" The deep voice was sharp and menacing. "I've been lookin' for yuh since we passed the Capes this mornin'. Been corkin' off all day, eh! But yuh stir yur bones when chow is blowed, and then to frost the cake yuh spill yur dinner all over the ladder and the deck for somebody else to swab up."

Boots attempted to answer but his speech seemed paralyzed. The familiar salty taste came back; he gagged, covering his bloody mouth with his hands.

The next moment the gaunt mate had gripped him around the ankle and was dragging him across the hard, steel deck. Once his head struck the corner of a hatch coaming, bringing the whole splendor of the firmament before his eyes. Then the dragging ceased, and as his ankle was released he felt vaguely the pressure of the mate's foot in the pit of his stomach, pushing him against the bulkhead. Simultaneously the mate's long, bony fingers clutched into the youth's long hair, and with this new grip dragged him a few feet farther and dropped him heavily.

His head seemed to fall into a hole, straining the cords in his neck. The grotesquely chalky, leering face bent close over his, and again the boot saw the murderous glint in the bright, greenish-blue eyes. Then the mate's lips moved, and as if from afar came the dreaded voice:

"Yuh rubber boot! Yuh farmer's pig! Whitey Mitchell either makes 'em or he breaks 'em—remember *that!*"

Boots made an effort to raise his head to reply, but he was too weak to speak.

"Keep yur head in that scupper 'till yuh can keep yur chow in yur belly," the boatswain's mate railed fiercely. "And don't forget—yuh're to be on the quarter-deck with yur holystone with the rest of the sailors at sun-up. I've got some nice easy work mapped out for yuh—it'll limber up yur back and help yuh to remember yur catechism. *Sabe?*"

The boatswain's mate put a savage physical emphasis on the last word by deliberately delivering a parting kick which caught the young apprentice seaman cruelly in the middle of the back, taking the last vestige of consciousness from his prostrate form. Then, half-singing and half-chanting the words to some grotesque ditty of the seas, the big, bullying petty officer disappeared forward into the darkness.

"Oh, often I mill 'em;
Aye, sometimes I've killed 'em;
But this one—I'll let him get by."

SEVERAL hours later Boots slowly regained consciousness. With the aid of a stanchion he gained his feet, and leaning weakly against the steel pillar he touched gingerly first one part of his anatomy and then another, as if to convince himself that flesh and bone still clung together. He discovered that his lips were swollen out of all proportion to the rest of his features, and that his head was drawn into a sidelong position, due to the stiffness of one of the neck cords.

His head was still swimming dizzily, and although he could not think clearly he realized vaguely that his greatest need was fresh air, and plenty of it. Groping his way forward in the darkness he found the hatch he had come down a few hours before and crawled up the ladder to the boat-deck. Then he stretched himself at full length under the protection of the first boat which met his eyes.

The storm had spent none of its fury. Every wave was now washing across the careening quarter-deck, and an occasional comber broke across the forecastle. For a long time Boots listened wearily to the rushing, hissing, and lapping of the seas as they broke across the decks; then his tired eyes gradually closed and he dozed away into unconsciousness.

The lonely wail of a seagull, coming from somewhere afar in the stormy distance,

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brought him suddenly back to consciousness. He was wide awake instantly—wondering. He remembered having heard at one time or other that seagulls were rarely seen at any great distance out at sea. For a moment he was puzzled; then, while he nursed his distorted neck meditatively, he strained an alert ear to the storm.

The lonely cry came again, this time much plainer and seemingly off the starboard bow. He listened again, intently, forgetting for the moment his miserable condition. Again the cry came, sounding now strangely like the agonized cry of a distressed human voice. And while he waited anxiously, it came once more. It *was* a human voice!

Boots jumped to his feet. The thought of a man overboard in the fury of that storm struck horror to his heart. His first thought was to give the alarm, but he decided quickly that he must first be sure. It might have been a seagull after all! He must see the man!

He stumbled along through the darkness to the hatch leading to the main-deck, almost fell headlong down the ladder, and a second later was undogging the first steel door leading out on the lee gallery. Another second and he stood upon the narrow, slippery deck.

He saw in a glance that he was on the starboard gallery, just aft of the starboard eight-inch-gun turret. The giant twin guns were trained aft, and he was standing directly beneath them in the shadows. Although the gallery was on a level with the quarter-deck he realized that he was in no great immediate danger; the seas could hardly reach him, for besides being amidships, it was the lee gallery.

Boots strained his eyes into the darkness in a desperate effort to fathom the source of the cry. At first the darkness disclosed nothing to his inexperienced eyes. Then, as if some higher destiny had taken a hand in the affair, a narrow rift appeared in the clouds and the moon broke through. Almost beneath him, yet a few yards forward, and moving gradually away from the drifting ship on the crest of a huge wave was the wan, corpse-like, upturned face of a man. The boot stared unbelievingly—it was the face of Whitey Mitchell.

For an instant he hesitated, but not longer. Fifteen minutes before he had, man-like, sworn by all that was sacred to him that when the proper hour should come he would wreak vengeance upon this man who had so heartlessly sought advantage of his weakness and misery. But now the tables had turned quickly and unexpectedly; the man he loathed and hated of all men was facing death and only immediate action could save him.

Almost at his feet, coiled neatly in the water-way, lay a long, one-inch manila line, one end of which was made fast to a cleat in the deck. Quickly the boot coiled it in his hand, watching fearfully meanwhile the white blotch on the lashing waters but a few yards distant. He weighed the coil carefully in his hand as he had seen experienced seamen do; then his hand shot out and the heavy line fell—a full yard short of the goal.

But the mate was a powerful swimmer and with three swift, long overhand strokes he reached and grasped the line. Then, apparently exhausted from battling against the mountainous seas, he made no further effort to swim, but waved one arm appealingly to the man on deck to haul him in.

Hand-over-hand, Boots hauled in the heavy line until the exhausted man's face was directly beneath him. Then, calling all of his remaining strength into action, he began to haul the gaunt boatswain's mate up the side.

But hauling the mate up the side was no light task, and especially for a man in a weakened condition. Had it been a straight upward pull it would have been impossible. But with the hard, round life-line serving in the primitive, but natural, capacity of a pulley, and in this manner pulling at right angles with the dangling human load below, the task would not have been impossible for a man of ordinary strength. But Boots, in his weakened condition was not a man of ordinary strength. Still, he was a man. He would do his best; no man can do more. Exerting every muscle he hauled steadily—desperately.

Slowly the white face and dark form appeared higher and higher on the side, until the head was barely four feet below the level of the deck. Then for a moment the boot quit hauling and braced himself against the life-line. In his weakened condition he was easily exhausted, and now he fought for his breath and the strength to lift the man the remaining few feet to safety. But even as he paused, from below him

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came the voice of Mitchell—threatening even in its helplessness.

"Haul me in—yuh blasted fool! I'll kill yuh—if yuh don't—hurry. Pull!"

Boots braced one foot against the life-line and, with a last great effort, pulled desperately, yet steadily. Suddenly, unexpectedly the foot on the wet deck shot out from under him and he fell heavily. Sharp curses, a splash, and the mate had plunged back into the sea.

The boot pulled himself to his feet and leaned heavily on the life-line weak and exhausted, staring dumbly at the white face outlined distinctly against the black waters. He thought vaguely to cry "man overboard!" but the words of the junior officer of the deck still rang in his ears—

"—if a man goes by the board tonight he's a goner. We won't risk a life-boat's crew for one man."

While the officer's words ran through his mind he noticed that, strangely enough, the white face did not drift farther from the ship. It looked as if the mate was clinging desperately to something, perhaps some object, which from the deck was invisible. Then Boots remembered. Several turns had been taken with one end of the line around a cleat on the deck, and the line was still fast to the ship. A great joy filled him and he murmured two brief words of thankfulnesss—

"Thank God!"

The man—the beast—might still be saved.

Quickly unloosening the line from the cleat so as to have a more direct pull, Boots let it to a little aft and frantically began to haul it in again. He wondered if the brutish Mitchell would be man enough to give him the credit for saving his life—saving to the world a man whose chief works were to beat, to maim, and perhaps to kill.

Tediously, inch by inch, the nearly exhausted youth on deck hoisted his load upward. Once, twice, three times he shouted for help, but each time the sound was swallowed up instantly by the storm. The dark form, a dead-weight, was again half-way up the side. But the man on deck was too weak to continue. Quickly taking a turn around the life-line to keep the mate from slipping back, he leaned against it to support his own weight, catching his breath in little, short gasps.

Again he shouted for help. There was no answer; and there was no sign of assistance. The gale merely snatched his cries from his lips and flung them from the ship. He realized that it was futile to pit his exhausted cries against the clamor of the wind and the waves.

His eyes met again the white upturned face below him, and he shouted feebly:

"Keep faith! I'll get you—up—somehow."

There was no answer. The boatswain's mate was apparently too weak to shout back, but there was something in his eyes which caused Boots to hesitate and look again. It was the old light he had seen before in those snake-like, greenish-blue eyes—it was madness, demoniacal madness.

Did Mitchell blame him for slipping back into the sea? Well, if there was to be a murder tonight he would not be the murderer. He had done, and would still do, his best. Lightning-like, these thoughts flashed through his mind.

Again he pulled steadily, straining himself in a final effort, but the dead-weight of his human burden did not move. To his horror he realized that he was too exhausted to raise the mate higher, and Mitchell was too weak to help himself. Instead of coming up, the boatswain's mate was sliding slowly back into the sea. There is a positive end to all human endurance, and Boots had reached the end of his.

He felt the skin tearing from his palms as the heavy line ground through them, but still he gripped the wet, manila line as a red-blooded, dying man clings to the last breath. He saw the bright, red blood on the line after it had passed through his hands, but still he clung to it like a barnacle. But even the last of the line had left the deck now, gradually shortening.

With a last supreme effort Boots brought the line under and over the life-line—a firm turn that would hold the mate until he might regain a little strength. Then suddenly the great ship lurched to port and seemed to slide broad-on into some gigantic, suddenly opened abyss. Like every other trick motion of the Unknown, it caught the breathless Boots unaware. He reeled, the side of his head struck mercilessly against the sharp edge of the life-line stanchion, his hands loosened momentarily their death-grip on the fateful line, and he sank helplessly to the deck.

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The next instant, wild-eyed, reeling, he was back on his feet, empty-handed, staring into sullen, forbidding space. But his distressed eyes saw nothing, nothing save the black, lashing mountains.

The dreadnaught changed its course slightly and the salty sprays, after flinging themselves playfully over both forecastle and bridge, dashed down upon the motionless young sailor where he stood just aft of the starboard waist turret. But the cool, saline liquid was soothing, and he welcomed it. Hopelessly he scanned the dark surface of the churning seas for some sign of Mitchell, but his eyes were only rewarded with the same wild, murky scene.

After a time he believed that he could distinguish a small, whitish blotch just visible in the distance off the starboard quarter, and fast disappearing. Perhaps his inexperienced eyes were deceiving him; perhaps not. But at this speck in the darkness Boots stared long—dumbly wondering.

AFTER what seemed ages—in reality it was but a few minutes—Boots turned dazedly and started for the slightly ajar steel door leading into the main-deck. He had just seen a strong man lose in the hopeless battle with the fury-lashed waters which give no quarter; had seen the man go to his inevitable death. And the pity of it all was that his every effort to save the man had failed. The fact that the man was his enemy meant nothing.

A little help, he kept telling himself, would have forestalled death, but he had been pitifully helpless in his attempts to call assistance. The driving gale, seemingly in sympathy and allied with the raging seas, had promptly smothered his feeble cries. A hellish alliance, Boots thought.

Half-way within the door he stopped and looked back again toward the surging, black seas. The sight of the monstrous combers which rolled up into mountainous snow-capped peaks and then broke and disappeared completely, only to be followed by another and another, held a great fascination for him. But they were not rolling now row upon row, range upon range, and all from the same direction, as they had done all during the day. The shifting winds were tossing them about pyramidwise, from any quarter. No man, Boots thought, could live long in that boiling maelstrom.

Just as he was turning to the main-deck for the last time a gigantic white-topped comber threw itself up from the extreme starboard quarter and rolled, hissing and churning, across the quarter-deck. A second later Boots stared hard, his eyes widening perceptibly. A dark, motionless form lay upon the wet, careening deck just to the left of the admiral's hatch, where it had been abandoned by the disappearing wave.

For several moments Boots stared wonderingly at the dark, misshapen mass. What monster of the deep was this? He had once heard of a shark being tossed upon the deck of a sea-going vessel in a storm. He would have gone closer and investigated but for the fear of being swept over the side.

Suddenly, while Boots' eyes opened still wider, the silhouette of a man shot across the wet slanting deck. A moment later the fellow had reached the dark mass and was bending over it. As he straightened up again he seemed to have just discovered Boots for the next instant he beckoned wildly and his shout, borne forward by a chance wind, reached the recruit's ears.

"Hey, sailor, hand us a lift!"

And the next breath—

"Shake a leg! Shake a leg!"

Forgetting both the danger and his weakened condition Boots hurried aft. The seaman who had beckoned to him was the gasoline-post sentry and, he saw with increasing wonder and amazement as he reached the admiral's hatch, the dark mass on deck was not a deep-sea monster but a man—Mitchell!

"Come out of the hop, Boots, he ain't a ghost," the sentry laughed shortly. "Grab his legs—we got to get him off the quarter-deck —— quick or we'll all be over the side."

With Boots at the feet and the sentry at the head, they hurried forward with their human freight. Once, as they had almost reached the starboard boat-deck ladder, an unseen comber which gushed suddenly between the after-turret and the main-deck superstructure caught them unaware and swept them off their feet. But fortunately it was not a large one and they were not carried to the life-line. In another minute they were safely on the boat-deck,

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and as they lowered Mitchell carefully to the deck he opened his eyes dazedly.

"Keep this—quiet," he finally gasped, after he had looked slowly and wonderingly from Boots to the sentry.

For several minutes there was silence, and then the half-drowned boatswain's mate continued slowly, almost painfully:

"A bosun's mate washed by the board—don't yuh see, the birds on this tub'll never get through kiddin' me. It's got to be kept quiet—nobody knows it but yuh two sailors."

The sentry laughed heartily.

"Don't worry, Whitey. The boot ain't goin' to say nothin', and I won't, so you'll hear nothin' more of it. But say——"

"What?" Mitchell demanded.

"I was just thinkin'—I've heard of sailors goin' over the side in a storm and then bein' tossed back on board again by some friendly wave, but I never believed such stuff till now."

Mitchell laughed unpleasantly.

"Yuh don't need to believe it now," he said gruffly. "Maybe it happens once in a hundred years or so, but it didn't happen this time. Them seas was rollin' up from ever' point of the compass, but if yuh think one of 'em hoisted me gently on board again yuh got another guess a-comin'."

A look of incredulity passed over the sentry's face.

"But that wave brought you up on the quarter-deck—I saw you on the crest of it," he declared stubbornly.

"Yur eyes wasn't keen enough, Blackie," the boatswain's mate returned smilingly. "I'll admit that one wave was kind enough to bang me up against the side of the ship, but that was all. And it didn't handle me nice and gentle like—it came mighty near bustin' ever' bone under my hide, I'm thinkin'. If the ship had been makin' good headway I'd have been chopped to pieces by the propeller, but as it was, buckin' these —— head-seas, she was nearly standin' still. That's all that saved me. When that wave banged me against the side my hand clutched something solid—it was the sea-ladder. Somehow I scrambled up, and then just as I got half-way through the life-line that wave struck me and jammed my head against something. That's the last I knew until I opened my eyes just now."

Blackie, the sentry, seemed keenly satisfied. Mitchell's experience merely strengthened his own convictions.

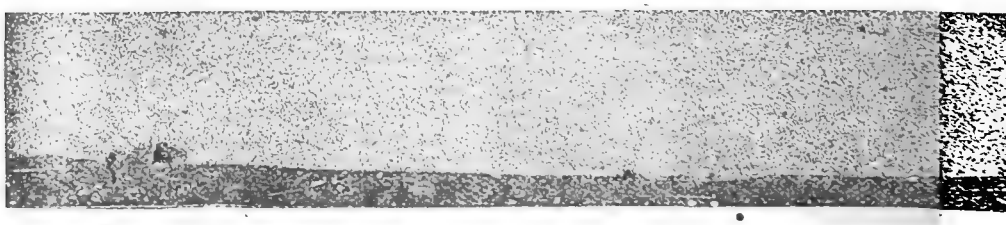
"I always claimed that the seas wasn't so blamed generous and kind as some birds seem to think," he beamed. "You were just lucky enough to grab the sea-ladder and save yourself, and then when you'd reached the deck safe the seas come up and slapped you in the back and broke your head against the admiral's hatch for a friendly farewell. Well, I'd better be gettin' back to my post before somebody finds me missin' and runs me up for a general court martial. Sweet dreams, gentlemen!"

After the sentry had disappeared through the bull-ring the white-haired boatswain's mate turned suddenly to Boots.

"That bird don't know all that's happened tonight, young fellow. I'm sorry that I handled yuh like I did, especially when yuh were sick, and I know I've got a whole lot to thank yuh for, even if yuh didn't have strength enough to haul me on board."

The big petty officer turned his wan, gaunt face seaward and stared long into the darkness. He seemed greatly stirred.

"Boots, I was raised on a hell-ship, and I've never quite gotten over it," he finally said, sorrowfully. "My ways have always brought me plenty of grief in the Navy—I've been busted twice—but I believe this has changed me. It's yuh that did it, and I think yuh've got the makin's of a good sailor. I'm goin' to see the division officer in a few days and ask him to put yuh up for seaman—so yur boot days are about over."



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TIGHT SQUEAKS IN THE SIOUX WAR OF 1876

by **E. A. Brininstool**

THE Battle of the Little Big Horn, or Custer's Last Fight, as it is more popularly known, of June 25, 1876, has produced many alleged survivors. All of them are fakes, pure and simple, with one exception, and that exception is "Curley," one of the four Crow scouts attached to Custer's command, who alone escaped alive from the battle-field, the other Crow scouts having hurried off the field before the fighting began. He was a youngster of eighteen at the time of the fight.

The steamer *Far West* which had brought part of the troops of the expedition to the mouth of the Little Big Horn, was lying anchored there awaiting further orders from Gen. Terry, who headed the expedition. On the morning of June 27, Capt. Grant Marsh, of the *Far West* and two or three others were idling away the waiting time fishing. They were discussing the possibility of Indians being in the immediate neighborhoood, when suddenly the green thickets at the point where they were talking, parted, and a mounted Indian warrior jerked up a lathered pony, making the peace sign to the men. He was immediately recognized as Curley, and was taken at once to the boat.

Once aboard he threw himself on the deck and gave way to the most violent demonstrations of grief. It was impossible to calm him. No one on the steamer could speak the Crow language, and Curley did not understand a word of English. At last a piece of paper and pencil were thrust into his hand, and Curley drew a rude diagram, while the Army and steamboat people silently watched. He drew a circle, then outside of it another, and between them made numerous dots, at the same time exclaiming: "Sioux! Sioux!"

He then began to fill the inner circle with dots, at the same time repeating excitedly: *"Absarokal Absarokal"*

This latter was interpreted to mean "soldiers," although really the meaning is "Crow," for the tribe by that name; but the Crows applied the title to the soldiers for whom they had scouted.

Curley then leaped to his feet and exclaimed: "Poof! Poof! Poof!" in imitation of rifle shots.

Capt. Baker, of the troops, exclaimed in a hoarse whisper—

"We're whipped, that's what's the matter!"

The sign language was here brought into play, and after many hours the following was gleaned from the excited Crow scout:

He stated that he was in the thick of the fight, with the soldiers surrounded by thousands of yelling, whooping Sioux, and that the soldiers were falling by scores amid the dust, smoke and noise of battle. Curley soon saw that the tide of battle was against the whites and that utter annihilation was evident. The last man of the soldiers whom he saw fall was Lieut. W. W. Cooke, the regimental adjutant.

At this juncture, and as the dense smoke and dust partially concealed his movements from the Sioux, he grabbed a blanket from the body of a Sioux warrior, and, watching his opportunity, sprang into a mêlée of those wildly excited warriors as they crowded forward to kill a little detachment of soldiers. Then, gradually working his way to the outer circle of the Sioux hordes, he found a wandering pony which he captured and on which he made his way back down toward the mouth of the river where he knew the boat was lying.

The account of the fight, as given to those aboard the *Far West* was later found to be correct in all its main features. Curley was the sole survivor of the defending forces, and the only other eye-witnesses were the hostiles themselves. That Curley's story was true is borne out from the fact that he was absolutely alone from the time he left the battle-field until he reached the *Far West*, and therefore had no opportunity to compare notes with any one and thus concoct a story. He was certainly present at the fight, else he could not have known facts, which, at the hour when he left the scene of the fight, were still unknown to Reno's survivors or those of Gen. Terry.

Curley's story is doubted by some, but there is no more warrant for doubting his tale than there would be for doubting the story of any other man whose assertions

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have no witnesses to prove them. Curley's reputation for truthfulness and veracity both before and since the battle has always been excellent, and he was assigned to Custer's command as one of that general's "six best scouts."

BUT the most marvelous escape from capture and death at the hands of hostile Indians during the Sioux campaign of 1876 was what is known in Army circles as the "Sibley scout."

Twenty-five picked men of the Second Cavalry, under command of Lieut. Fred W. Sibley, with two guides, the renowned Frank Grouard and Baptiste Pourier, known as "Big Bat," were sent by Gen. George Crook from his encampment on Big Goose Creek—on the spot where the city of Sheridan, Wyoming, now stands—to discover if possible the location of the big village of hostiles under Gall, Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, who but two weeks previously had met and overwhelmed the Custer command and then hastily decamped.

Some fifty miles northwest of camp they came in touch with a war-party numbering hundreds of Sioux and Cheyennes. Retreat was impossible, as the country was practically open over which they had come. The only escape was by ascending the Big Horn Mountains. By the time the savages had stumbled upon the trail of the Sibley party, Grouard had the troopers ascending a steep mountain trail a mile in advance of the foremost of their pursuers.

The party advanced rapidly; and finally, concluding they had thrown their pursuers off the track, they halted to make coffee while Grouard continued ahead to ascertain whether any of the Indians had managed to get to another trail by which they might be possibly headed off. He discovered that the Indians were in the trail ahead in overwhelming numbers.

Grouard led the party off the main trail to the right, and cautiously advanced. Suddenly from the rocks ahead of them came a ringing volley fired by over two hundred of their enemies, but not a man of the party was struck. Grouard and his party retreated into a patch of heavy timber, tied their horses to trees in plain sight of the Indians, and then sought the shelter of rocks and the fallen timber. Soon they were entirely surrounded by the savages, who fired hundreds of shots into their shelter; but not a single shot took effect. For some hours this was continued, the troopers reserving their ammunition for a possible rush by their foes.

The cordon of savages hemmed the little party in closer and closer, and not a man would have escaped but for the wonderful tact and frontiersmanship of Frank Grouard, at that time a mere youth of twenty-six. The Indians were led by a chief named White Antelope, well known to Grouard, who had been a captive in Sitting Bull's band for over six years. The scout was recognized by many of the Indians, who shouted that his time had come.

At a critical moment Grouard managed to make a most wonderful double killing by shooting both White Antelope and another Indian with a single shot. The two Indians were riding one behind the other, and the bullet from Grouard's rifle pierced White Antelope's body and also killed the Indian riding behind.

Immediately Grouard noticed that great consternation reigned in the ranks of the savages. He told Sibley that this was the time to try for an escape. The Indians in their rear had worked off to one side in the confusion of the death of their leader, and the troopers fired two or three volleys and then retreated, leaving their dead and dying horses.

It was some time before their retreat was noticed, and by that time Grouard had the entire party headed higher into the mountains. He led them along dizzy precipices and through the roughest country he could possibly find, where he knew the Indian horsemen could not follow. The clothing of the command was torn to ribbons, their boots worn out and their constitutions almost wrecked, but Grouard would not allow a single man to halt an instant, until far into the night.

Before dawn of the next day he had Sibley and his men again on the move, and finally reached a point in the mountains, where twenty miles away, he knew Crook's camp lay. As they were descending the mountain the party nearly ran into another big band of Sioux, but fortunately were not discovered.

Before the camp was reached two of the men had gone raving mad from the awful journey and the terrible exposure in the snowy range, and the entire command were a sorry sight; but they had been brought through by the indefatigable Grouard without the loss of a single man.

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MIGHTY MOTHERHOOD

by F. St Mars

Author of "Strange Company," "A Beast of No Account," etc.

So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life.—*Tennyson*

THE pool was a quiet little place, a backwater from the river, hidden from the world by rank grass ten feet high, by spreading stately thorn-trees and wild fig-trees; and when the water-lilies were in bloom—rich purple beneath the nodding feathery plumes of papyrus grass—very beautiful.

Nobody ever came there from the outer world except the spotted guinea-fowl, the gentle doves at even to drink, and now and then a solitary zebra or an old bull gnu at early dusk. And nobody lived there much, it would seem, except a snaky darter, sitting above the water with wings hung out to dry, two beautiful white egrets, and one vulture with a bald head and an evil leer.

Also there was the musky smell—faint, sickly and undecided, but there. Presumably somebody owned it. There was never anybody on view to own it, that one could see, yet it was there, when the flowers bloomed and when they did not bloom. In the rainy season, and in the dry, it was there; by night as well as by day. It was not nice.

Then, upon an afternoon when the temperature stood somewhere about ninety degrees and even the insects had dropped their everlasting hum by an octave, and the yellow-billed hornbill somewhere far down the river had left off muttering: *"Tockl Tockl Tock-tocky tockl"* at thirty-second intervals, and the golden cuckoo on a far tree-top had ceased his monotonously mournful *"Di-di-di-didricl"* she, the female hippopotamus, came that way.

She arrived by the little side waterway—scarce more than a water-tunnel under the solidly banked foliage—that led, all choked and slimy, from the main river; and the extraordinary part about it was that she came in silence. Seeing that she weighed possibly about two and a half tons, this feat was in itself no small matter, especially since a human being could not have moved five yards in that place without creating no end of noise.

She was not beautiful, this lady of the river-horse people; but she was phenomenally big even for a hippopotamus, and her head was enormous, and when she opened her mouth to yawn hugely in the face of the molten sun and showed her bent and mighty tusks, one felt that any one standing upon the brink thereof might quite easily become giddy and tumble bodily in.

The darter looked at her and said nothing. The white egrets did not even look, and said less; and the very old vulture had no chance to do either, for he was away all day, as

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per custom—on business. Remained only the musky smell!

And after making one careful, precise circuit of the pool bank as a man would look over an empty house, the cow hippopotamus sniffed.

She sniffed again, and, sinking, made one careful and precise circuit of the pool, on the bottom, and galloping!

If one had opened a stop-cock in hell and instituted one fine new geyser, the result could not have been very much more alarming. Came snorts like the remarks of an impatient locomotive, which was the hippopotamus come up for a deep breath. Came then swirls and twirls, waves and bubbles, and upheavals of a mighty and a watery nature, and the pool boiled to lapping over.

The darter came up, looking worried, and swam to a tree-stump; the white egrets daintily skipped higher up the bank, like paddlers surprized by a wave; a water-snake with a red mouth removed himself hissing, and—and this was where the shoe rubbed the hippo's heel—a five-foot crocodile was followed by a seven-foot crocodile, which in turn was followed by an eleven-foot horror out of the pool, vamoosing at speed down the little side waterway through the undergrowth, by way of which the hippopotamus had come.

And that cow hippo hunted them along there for fifty yards—always under water—to see that they were well started upon their travels and would cherish no hopes of return. And the musky smell, that sickly reek of mystery that had hung over that pool for years, went with them!

It was noticeable that the crocodiles made no attempt to argue with that hippopotamus. Open warfare is not the crocodile's way. He does not like the "square deal." If he can not get his foe, or his prey—the one is often the other—unawares and at a disadvantage, on the ground chosen by himself, and his own time, with everything on his side, he is the worst coward in the wilds, and will not fight at all.

Moreover, a grown two-and-a-half-ton hippopotamus with jaws that could chop any man in half as active in the water as a beetle in a box, and with skin next only in toughness to the croc's own scales, might be too hectic a proposition for an eleven-foot crocodile, or even a fourteen-foot one.

Then why the notice to quit, you ask? And that's true. Only I said, "grown hippos."

The old cow had charged—with extraordinary speed and agility too—grunting and tooting like a ten-times-magnified pig, plus a penny steamboat. Now she came back in silence, and turned—"magicked" would be more the word—herself into four small knobs that might have been tips of mud-lumps or tops of sunken twigs, if they had not been her eyes and nostrils, designed, submarine-periscope fashion, to see and smell without her being seen and smelled in return.

Beneath these the cow hippo floated invisible just under the surface. It was her way of getting to know the inhabitants of the place, if there were any more whom she had not so far seen. But there were no more except the vulture, and at the end of something over half an hour the hippo submerged completely, and as soundlessly as the departing of a shadow.

THERE was at one screened corner of that little pool a spot where a some time, in some flood or flurry the bank had been eaten out, creating high, arched hollow with a sandy floor an a sandy strand of old gold in front of i The peculiarity of the place was th peculiarity of the hidden pitfall; no on could see it until he was into it.

But surely the old hippo did not discov it entirely by chance, for her next appea ance in this world was directly and su denly up, dripping and gurgling and shinin on to that old-gold strand, as unexpected as a—no, not as a fairy from a trap-doo Two and a half tons of *embonpoint*, and mouth the size and shape of a cabin-tru can not be stretched to the word "fairy But she did appear most astonishing quickly, quietly, and unexpectedly light for all that. Without seeing, one cou never have believed it of her; unless, course, one has traveled far through a lived long in her home, Africa, and th one will believe anything.

A monitor lizard, length, unmeasur six feet—*varanus niloticus*, according science, and a black-and-yellow devil w a whip-like tail according to the darter a the egrets—had thought he owned t hollow till that moment. Thereafter, w one resounding splash—flying headlon into the water, and a whip-like crack of

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tail upon the hippo's pursuing nose, he was sure he did not own it. The cow hippo owned it, tenancy counting from that date inclusive.

Thereafter night came stalking swiftly over the towering tree-tops, as it does in such lands, heralded by the vulture, who sailed down out of the copper dome of heaven as if he had been hung up there, right up in the very apex, all day. And hard on the heels of night came a great bat, yellow and purple as a gigantic butterfly, and hung up under the bank almost exactly above the enormous broad back of the hippopotamus; and a jackal howled somewhere in the deathly stillness very far away and very dismally—

"Yaaá-ya-ya-ya-ya!"

Then a little dun cloud, "no bigger than a man's hand," that seemed too small and too weak to do anything, came rushing and tearing along overhead, threshing the trees into roaring madness and picking up the dust into smoke-like clouds; and the tropic rain came stabbing down and smothering everything except the lightning, which ripped the dark asunder with jagged rents that seemed to be tearing with the sound of thunder.

Once it sounded as if the hippopotamus could be heard grunting through the inferno of the storm, but except for that there was no sign or sound of any living thing in all earth or sky.

Dawn did not rediscover the big, old cow hippopotamus. The dripping creepers and vines, all starred with white and pale crimson blooms, hung very thickly over the hollow under the bank like a curtain, shutting out the prying eyes of day from any view of the interior. And the spotless egrets, shaking out their chiffon-like plumes in the new warmth, and the darter, body submerged, neck only exposed from the water, never seemed to turn even so much as an inquisitive eye there.

Once indeed the old vulture, just before unfurling his huge vans and launching himself from the age-old thorn-tree, did stare hard with his cold orbs under his bald pate at the hollow; then he went with a harsh, dry hustle of feathers, and left the quiet cold to the hum of the insects, the tiny *plop* of an occasional fish, the damp heat, and the silence, for the rest of the day.

When the dark came—it was a different dark from that of the night before, still and warm and echoing, and all stuck about with tall stars and a copper moon—nothing had happened to disturb the tranquil life of the little pool, beyond the killing of a jeweled dragonfly, hovering over the surface, by a leaping fish, and the slaying of the fish by the diving darter, and the suddenly light and parachute-like flight of the two egrets three times round the pool at about dusk, for no reason at all that one could make sure of except to prove that they could fly perhaps.

Nobody saw anything of the big, old cow hippo. She might be dead, or gone, or asleep only. And nobody cared to peer behind that screen of creepers and vines curtaining the hollow under the bank merely to find out.

At the very last moment just before dark, when the sun, almost on the ground, threw a level and blood-red glow from behind the trees, as it were distant cities afire, a couple of lions somewhere afar, and evidently parted, had suddenly begun a series of tremendous grinding, coughy grunts, throwing the vast, deep volume of sound backward and forward to one another ball fashion, as giants that play "catch" with thunder-clouds, and then as suddenly had stopped.

But except for that the evening was wonderous shy of the usual wild-folk noises, and still, as it is still when the curtain goes up at the theater on a tragedy. Nature, in fact, was about to ring up the curtain upon one of her vivid dramas, and had been summoning and marshaling the actors from afar.

Then in the darkness came the sound of a snort, subdued, wet, but unmistakable, and hollow gurgles, that denoted some large body leaving the water; for even the biggest may take to it, but few leave water, quite without sound.

That, the roosting egrets and the darter and the vulture might have said, represented the cow hippopotamus, after bath and a drink, going ashore to feed. The wonderful part about it was, however, that up to the actual landing she had contrived to keep so silent.

Now the landing of hippopotami to feed is no small matter, just as they are themselves no small matter. When one has a live weight of two and a half tons to keep going and is a herbivora—that is, a vegetarian—a "certain quantity of food," as the

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books say, "is necessary daily" (or nightly) for the system. Therefore it was sometimes necessary for this monster, in common with her kind, to make quite a little pilgrimage from the vicinity of water o' nights to find the quantity required and what was wanted—grasses, reeds, and young shoots.

The hippo had been used to following well-trodden paths of her own and her friends' making, raised in the middle where the girder-heavy feet did not tread, and driven like tunnels through and under everything.

Here, being newly come to the place, she had none, so she took her own line of country, driving straight through thorn and papyrus, reed and grass—it cut like sword-blades, that grass—and acacia scrub, and wait-a-bit thicket—with six-inch thorn hooks that did not make her wait, though—and vine and counter vine, and creeper tangle all along, and all as it came, feeling her way steadily, slowly and ponderously away from water all the time, and indifferent as a "tank" to anything and everything, animate and inanimate, that came in her way.

The former removed. The latter were removed, crushed down and flat. If the former failed to remove, they joined the latter. It was all the same to the hippopotamus, and she appeared to be beautifully, supremely and insolently—with a true pig's insolence—unconscious of all.

Presently something growled at her, dry and harsh, which may have been a leopard, and something howled in a manner that deserved shooting, and that was a jackal; and another thing, dim as a ghost, with eyes like tiny bull's eyes, gibbered and chirruped, so it probably was the leopard's cousin, a cheetah; and again quite a lot of things at various points and times coughed and barked and whistled and snorted and stamped; and they probably were baboons, bushbuck, reedbuck, and one rhinoceros, who in the dark might have passed for a second-hand locomotive broken down.

And then very suddenly came, from some distance, a perfectly diabolical noise, and every other voice in the wilderness was instantly dumb—with fright.

"*Ph-e-a-l-l-ll!*"

The high, sobbing, long-drawn, unearthly wail pealed through the dark slowly, dispassionately, horribly, and stopped. And in the dead, dumb silence that followed on could hear, could literally feel, that ever living beast within hearing remained rooted rigid—frozen in its tracks where it stood

Every living beast, that is, except th big cow hippopotamus. She continued t crash and crush and scrunch and tramp mountainously about, as unheeding, as i solently careless in her gigantic might as the cry had never been.

A pause followed. Then suddenly, agai but nearer—

"*P-h-e-a-l-ll!*"

And dead, cave-like, stricken, waitin watching, tense silence after.

Finally yet again, quite close now a perfectly abominable, that awful waili once more shrieked forth—

"*P-h-e-a-l-ll!*"

The old hippo snorted monumentally answer, but took no further notice. S took no notice, either, of a little slim, slir ing form, seen for a moment in a moon clearing, looking at her with eyes that sho like small green lamps—a jackal all alone.

There was something ghostly malevol in that thin, solitary, silent shape the something horrible in the way it stared her, something— Ah! Horror! And one half-expected it, for this jackal obviously not like other jackals. There something suggestively sinister about The scavenger of death sat down a sticking its muzzle at the half-baked mo wailed more horribly, more unspeaka malignantly than ever—

"*P-h-e-a-l-ll!*"

Now that is not the ordinary and leg mate voice of any sane and self-respec jackal at all. The jackal says, "*Yaaa ya-ya-ya!*" and that is mournful and erable enough in all conscience.

They do say, however, that the jack the only beast in the wild that can go ma clean bust hydrophobially mad. Also say that that wretched "*Pheall!*" cr heard only when there is some great terrible killing afoot, and that the ja which utters it always goes alone be lions, and—here accounts differ—may may not be a ghost jackal and no jack this earth at all.

However that may prove, the appar in the clearing there looked and sou ghostly enough for any one, and— was that?

Close by, on the hippo's right, there

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come a soft, swishing sound, as it may have been a silk skirt, among the high grass. It stopped, and gave place to a long-drawn sigh, spook-like, empty, elemental—a shocking noise to hear in the dark.

Followed dead silence for a minute while the hippo at last stood motionless, then turned and began to feed her way back to the river. Thereafter the swishing was repeated, but this time upon the other side of the hippo. Then that beastly, hungry sigh again, and then two lights—but surely they were glow-worms ashine!—were suddenly switched on between the long grass in the dark. The old cow hippo snorted, this time quite like a locomotive, and grunted a grunt which in any less huge beast would have been a great noise, and proceeded, feeding as she went, back to water, but rather less slowly than before perhaps.

War was declared with the devilish suddenness and unexpectedness that only one knowing the wild would expect. There was no warning, no preliminary ultimatum in the shape of a growl or a snort or a stamp or something—nothing but the incredibly swift, thumping rush and the low, coughing grunt as the lion at the end of his rush grappled—grappled a full-grown hippopotamus! But in spite of his savage stupendous strength, it would have been cheaper for him to have assaulted one of the trains on the Uganda Railway and have finished with it.

The old cow hippopotamus spun in her tracks with the unexpected agility of a beetle on a pin; but her steel gate of a mouth, when it shut with a crash, did not find the lion there. He had revolved with her—clinging to her back.

Also he was not an orphan apparently. There were other lions to the number of two—all ravenously hungry; the sighs said so, and the fact that they had attacked the old hippo at all proved it.

They must have been starving, for this was a serious proposition they were taking on in the prey line, this leviathan of the waters.

Next instant, with a succession of snorts that would have become an engine on an up-grade and grunting the biggest thing in pig grunts imaginable, the hippopotamus, the water beast, dashed suddenly as a pig would dash—for water. There was no question of stampede. She had reasons.

And the lions went with her, two of them; one on her back, one racing alongside. The third, flat-eared, barefanged, fiery-eyed, tail lashing, snarling and terrible, barred her path.

At least, it barred her path for one instant. The next—it went down, clawing, tearing, biting, writhing, roaring, crushed almost bodily in two by those appalling, tremendous jaws of the hippo, whose sudden, boring dash waterward was too unexpected to allow even the lioness time to clear itself quite in that impenetrable tangle of vines, thorn, creeper and branch. What happened to her under the hippopotamus only itself could know, and it was dead—a ghastly dark blotch almost trodden into the earth—by the time it appeared on the other side.

The hippopotamus kept on. Never would one have believed how a hippopotamus could shift, and how suddenly, if one had not seen it then in that minute.

She made her own path, straight through everything, like an avalanche; and the lion on her back came off in the first quarter of a mile with much of his mane torn off him and most of the breath knocked out of his body by the branch of a thorn-tree.

His place was taken by the second lion. None of them apparently could make much impression, even with their great fangs, upon the hippo's marvelously thick hide; and besides they had to keep leaping off or risk being brained or torn up in one or more pieces by the thorns. And a fourth lion came racing along, tracking like a hound.

But nothing seemed to make any difference to the old hippopotamus—not even the noise, and that was enough to make the blood run cold; it could be heard a mile away. All she wanted to do, and all she meant to do, was to get back to the pool, and she went.

She had taken a long time getting away from the pool, but precious little time getting back to it again. Nothing alive on earth could stop her. Her arrival there was precipitant, tremendous and appalling. Two lions clung to her still, and the growling and snarling of them were horrible to hear. The second lion was licking his wounds by the way, and the first lion simply was not any more.

But the old cow hippopotamus never stopped, never checked even, but plunged headlong, bodily in, with a splash as of a

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falling cliff. Never were two kings more wobegone, surprized or bedraggled, and never did they swim to dry ground more quickly. And why? They had to! The old cow hippo was after them, jaws first; at least, her terrible jaws were, for she could scarcely be seen behind them. And those lions did not wait.

Five minutes later the old cow hippopotamus slowly and heavily but very softly padded up to the hollow under the bank. She vanished beneath, and something moved in the darkness behind the tangled vines there, something pig-like, pinkish, and enormously fat. It was the monster mother's little hippo baby, only recently born.

No wonder she had determined to get home in spite of any living thing.

TUN-KAN-SI-DAN (THE SUN)

by Frank H. Huston

WANDE-SHA (GRAY EAGLE) was old, very old—an *unk-pa-pa*. He had taken a squaw from the people of the Blue Cloud and cast his fortune in with them.

He was the camp "teller of stories," rich with the legends of many nations; and when other audience failed he was sure of a welcome at the tepee of Shunka, the white Arapaho, who soaked in the folk-lore of the tribes as the sands of Lodge-Pole Creek soak in the living waters.

He glanced upward toward the clear sky, bright with stars and the full moon at the zenith.

"*Ungkh!* Han-te-u-we (the moon) has washed her face," he remarked. "And Tun-kan-si-dan (the sun) has a full belly."

"My ears are open, my father," responded Shunka. "Tell me the story of An-pe-tu-wee the sun."

"Listen then, my son; the sun is the medicine father (*Wakan Ate*) and the moon is his wife, while the stars are their children. Every day he must travel the old trail to see that all is well with the world, and when he is hungry he catches one of his children and eats it.

"They all live in a long cave underneath the world; so narrow that they can not turn around and so must crawl through and come out at the entrance at the East, *Wee-ho-e-u-pa*. See, Shunka."

The old man pointed to a comet with its tail of flame.

"There is one he almost caught; but it escaped wounded, and the blood streams out behind as it flees.

"When the sun has covered the trail he crawls in the hole to sleep, and the moon and their children creep out of the other end and follow in safety the trail the sun has left; for he can not turn around but must sleep and then go through the cave.

"When he has eaten many children the moon's heart is sad, and she blackens her face and mourns, so for some days you can not see her; but the paint wears off little by little, so you see more and more until as now her face is clean. Soon she will start to paint again, and after a while her whole face will be concealed.

"*Micagé—he-micagé* (That is true; yes, it is true). He can not catch the strong stars but only the slowest or those who sleep late and do not come out of the hole early. That is why, Shunka, they are never seen together; for *Unk-tee-hee* God would eat up all his children otherwise, the moon's face would be always black, and *mako-ee-un-kit-a-wa-pi* (this our country) would be like the heaven of the Piegans, cold and dark for always. It is spoken."

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A MAN'S BEST DOG

by Raymond S. Spears

Author of "To Make It Self-Defense," "The Last Wolf," etc.

A MAN needs a dog. You take a pup, or anyhow a young dog, and raise him right, and you've got something. Lots of people don't know how to treat a dog right, no matter how many they handle; but take me now, and I understand dogs. Why, you might say, I've lived with dogs all my life. Lots of dogs is more satisfactory around hunting, or anywhere, than humans.

Now you take that hound I had two years ago, Flop-Ear; there wasn't hardly anything the matter with that dog except he had a moon-eye, and this bothered him some, account of his being a fast sight-trailer in the snow. I never would have let him go only he was kind of old when I got him, and besides if the baby pulled his tail or anything he showed his teeth. He never did bite anybody, but I had my suspicions.

My wife liked Tubby better than any dog I had, but he wa'n't worth a darn in the woods or to hunt anywhere. So I traded Tubby for Flop-Ear, and Flop-Ear for that black dog I had. I was looking, you see, for exactly the dog I wanted and needed.

You remember I called him Slimp. I don't know where I got that name, but it just popped into my head one day when I was wondering what I would call him. He would run a ways, and every once in a while he would sort of slip sideways, and I thought of him being slim and slipping, and the words sort of jumbled together, and I said he was the slimpsiest dog I ever see, so I called him Slimp, just like that.

Slimp was a good dog too, but he wasn't any hanger. He was good for rabbits, and made me think about the thin, big dog-before-last that I owned— No, let's see! Not Tubby, but Bellyawp—Bellyawp's the dog I mean. He was a dandy! I tell you, when Bellyawp hit the trail and began to open up, you could bet your boots something was ahead of him.

You could hear him two miles if the wind was right, and he never would quit. He was a trail-sleeper. Why, that dog would follow a fox all day long, and when he was tired he would lie down and rest a while, going to sleep, and then when he woke up he would take after Mr. Fox just like brand new. He used to fool a lot of foxes thataway.

Bellyawp took after a big, red fox over south one day, along in the afternoon. It was freezing hard, and scent didn't hold any good, but he picked that track up, for he had an awful good nose, rousted Mr. Fox into Colander Gulf and took him a long circle off over toward Jordan.

Well, sir, I hung around till dark, and then I waited after dark, for a man don't like to leave his dog out. I heard him

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once, and thought he was back-tracking, looking for me; but he had brought the fox back, and then I didn't hear him any more. I never knew, them days, he was a trail-sleeper, and I never went home till after ten o'clock that night. My land! My wife talked to me—thought I'd shot myself or some foolishness like that.

Well, Bellyawp didn't come home that night, so next morning, which was Monday, I laid off and went looking for him. If he wasn't running that fox yet! Yes, sir! He had him going hot track, too. There was snow on the ground course, being January, and I looked over the tracks, and I found where Bellyawp had left the fox track, and went over to a clump of hemlocks, and laid down to sleep. There was the bed where he'd laid down, and his tracks, so I could read real plain in the snow what he'd done. He went back to the track, took it up, and I found where the fox had laid down too, and rested, melting the snow, he was so warm, running.

Well, sir, you know, Bellyawp was so interested he wouldn't call off, but kept going. He was three days on that trail and he never would have quit it, and I know it, but the fox holed in, and then Bellyawp came home. I killed lots of foxes ahead of Bellyawp, lots of them; but you know, he ate so blamed much that I was ashamed to ask one butcher for enough meat to give him a square meal, and I'd go to two shops, and that way I'd get enough. But one day that Summer, I carried him, I bet, ten pounds of dog meat, and then my wife gav him some horse meal we'd bought a bag of, and when he'd eat all that he asked for more. That sure disgusted me, so I traded him for Flop-Ear, the way I said, and then I had Slimp.

Slimp was a middling young dog, and he hadn't had much experience. I took him out with three or four different dogs—good ones, too—but he didn't seem to have much interest in them. Oh, he'd trail along, having a good nose, but he wasn't what I'd call a reliable dog.

The fellow, the man I got him off of, hadn't taken any pains with Slimp when he was a puppy. He let him run around and chase chickens and motor-cycle fellows, and he was kind of a wild dog. He was old enough to settle down, but he always wanted to play just when he'd ought to have been working. And his chasing chickens made him a mean dog to have around.

So when I heard the Milk Factory Hennery people were looking around, trying to find who owned a black dog which had been killing a lot of their chickens, I took Slimp up the line and traded him far enough away so he wouldn't come back on me none. And he didn't, either. I'm always a great hand when I trade dogs to go away off somewhere so I won't be bothered none, having them come back.

Of course, f a dog has been traded a few times for one reason or another, he knows what's expected of him, and he settles down where he's left, understanding about it. So Slimp didn't come back, and I heard afterwards a farmer back in the Middleville hills who raised turkeys, shot him and tried to collect on damages from the town under the sheep law, but turkeys ain't sheep. You'd think a farmer'd know that.

The fellow I traded him to was tickled to death. You see, he never hunted his dog with a collar on, and Slimp not having a collar on or anything, the farmer couldn't identify him.

Anyhow the fellow I traded Slimp to had this dog I have now. He didn't seem to think much of him, but I could see he'd make a humdinger if he was took care of, and sort of fussed with some. I know dogs, I do. I've had lots of experience with them, and that way a man gets to know them.

Take somebody that never owned but one dog, or two perhaps; what do they know about dogs? I tell you, they don't know nothing. How can they? Why, dogs are as various as humans, and they have feelings; they has spells of will and spells of won't, just like a woman or anybody. And you can't blame them, either.

Now you take a dog that has worms. You can't expect a dog feeling that way to be brisk and lively as he would if he had been taken care of, now can you?

I ask you man to man, if you think a dog that ain't well ought to be worked the same as one that is well. Why, it stands to reason a man ought to know better than to expect a dog that is off his feed a bit to do what a dog that's feeling good can do. So come it I picked up Bowlegs, getting him for Slimp and fifteen dollars to boot.

I could see that fellow was anxious to get rid of Bowlegs, and course, when you see a man anxious to trade you want to

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figure out what's the matter. I knew, just the minute I laid eyes on him, what ailed Bowlegs. He was off his feed. There wasn't anything particular the matter of him. Tongue pretty good, eyes not much bloodshot, and he wagged his tail first class when I patted him.

Dogs like me. I can do anything with the ugliest dog that ever lived, but Bowlegs wasn't ugly. Of course, he had kind of a peculiar disposition showing the first minute I looked at him. But that was account of him not feeling good.

Well, I traded, and so Bowlegs led home behind me on to a chain. I stopped and rested him two or three times. Then home I just laid off to doctor him up, and get him back on his feet again.

Now look't him! Did you ever see a dog look better than he does? Look at his eyes—his tongue, and the way he wags his tail.

Another thing; look the way his coat shines. You take a dog that don't feel right, and about the first place it shows is his hair. I don't want any dog that don't have shiny hair.

Bowlegs satisfies me. I always said, when I found a dog that satisfied me I'd never ask for another dog, or trade, or anything. Bowlegs is just a natural-born fur dog.

Oh, he'll run rabbits! He runs rabbits good. Fact is, I never did see a likelier dog for rabbits than this here Bowlegs. I've had him after rabbits, and when I took down my shotgun and said: "Raggets! Raggets!" he knowed right off what I wanted.

Let me tell you about that dog. He's peculiar. Some dogs is peculiar, and so blamed peculiar they ain't nothing else; but Bowlegs ain't that way. Being peculiar is good for him. Seems just like he knows better than you do what is up. As I said, he's a fur dog.

When I got him I particularly wanted a 'coon dog. You know 'coon dogs is different from other dogs. You want a pretty fast dog, and one that will fight. You find a place where 'coons is using around, in corn, or along a creek or anywhere, and it's night. You hunt 'coons at night.

Well, now you take a slow trailer, and he'll monkey around and monkey along, and an old 'coon knows just what's happening and he rides away, gets into a ledge of rocks or where you can't hunt him out, and he's gone.

Now Bowlegs understood natural the nature of 'coons. Minute he hit a hot 'coon track he was off so fast his tail snapped. Well, sir, it wa'n't but a minute or two an' he was up with that old 'coon. My lan-nd but he was a big 'coon! Closed right in with him, and you could hear 'em fightin' a mile.

You see, Bowlegs is a fightiner dog, too, See the way his under jaw sticks out? Well, I claim he's got some bulldog into him—not enough to make him ugly, but just right to make him gritty.

He's a handsome dog. He's such a good-looking, useful dog, I took him to the secretary of the Utica Dog Show to enter him. That was last Winter. He said Bowlegs was sure the handsomest hunting-dog in his class, and we could put him into either the rabbits-hounds or fox-hounds classes; but he was specially a red-bone hound, only for the way his underjaw sticks out. Taken in the field and fightin's necessary, that jaw's a big advantage. You see, lots don't understand it, but when the lower jaw sticks out and a dog bites, his nose is clear, and he can breathe even when he's hanging on.

But they wouldn't let me enter him to the dog show, not if I paid my five dollars or anything. Said they didn't have any dogs of his class there. Oh, well, you know these dog-show dogs; generally they ain't worth a whoop in the field anyhow, not for hunting.

Well, sir, you know, he closed in with that big 'coon up there toward Colander Gulf, and they fit, and then they separated some, and the 'coon was hitting for the gulf to hide in the rocks; but Bowlegs knowed—course he knowed what was up—and he kept a-fightin' in, and the 'coon kept fighting off, but that old 'coon couldn't stand the racket. He climbed a tree, and I come up and shined him. Betcher he come down quick then.

Well, sir, you know, that 'coon hide had ten-'leven cuts where Bowlegs had slashed him. Darn near spoiled that hide for selling to a fur trader; but I sewed up the tears, and done it nice with silk, and then combed it, and sold it for about regular rates. But he don't tear up 'coons that-away, only once in a long while. Generally when a 'coon hears him coming, the nearest tree's the tree for him.

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Now you know how it is about 'coon-hunting. You want a dog that don't give a 'coon any chance to pick his climbings. Take a 'coon that a dog lets have his way, and he'll get into a stone cave or up some tree where the farmer won't let you cut it down or burn it out. So he's gone.

But Bowlegs; he has the right idea. He hangs right to their tails, and they got to climb or fight, and mostly they climb. Why, I've killed 'coons out an apple-tree with Bowlegs.

Yes, sir! If there ever was a natural-born fur dog, it's Bowlegs. If I take down my gun at night, and tell him: "Tree 'em! Bowlegs! 'Coons tonight—get 'em; lick 'em, old boy!" and he looks a the gun, and he wags his tail, and he's so anxious he can't really bark out, but's kind of hoarse and squeaky, he's so happy.

But if I take the spade, why Bowlegs is kind of disappointed; but he's faithful. He does what you want him to do. He goes to the first creek and begins to run up and down, and don't pay any attention to 'coon tracks, or anything but muskrats.

But let me tell you Bowlegs ain't just a muskrat dog, even when you got a spade and a bag to carry home the rats you dig' out. Why, one night I was up in Sunbeam Gulf. You know what that is! The flat is nice and soft digging, sort of marshy, and muskrats all along the brook. But the sides are lined with trees, cedar thickets and brushy. Lots of rabbits there, and it's a great place for foxes to lie down and sun themselves.

Well, you know I took Bowlegs there and we had four-five muskrats dug out, and all of a sudden Bowlegs give a yip and away he went.

He ran across the bottoms, and I thought it was a traveler. Take a muskrat that's a traveler, and he just starts off over the hills, maybe a mile or five miles. Made me mad! We'd just got started after rats, and there we run into a traveler.

Well, Bowlegs ran up the side-hill, circling around, and I could see after a while it wasn't exactly natural, the way a muskrat traveling would go. A muskrat traveling goes straight, and across the open he runs, fast as he can, like a rabbit, but jumping about three foot.

I didn't want to call Bowlegs off, if it was a muskrat. That might discourage him. You don't want to abuse a dog, discouraging him, if he's working the way you want him to—only perhaps you're a fool, and don't know as much as the dog.

Take me, now, and I never say a word to a dog till I know what he's thinking. When you understand dog nature, lots of times you'll think a dog has one thing on his mind when he's got something else.

So I didn't say a word when Bowlegs circled and yelped and run around up on the side-hill for an hour. Course, two-three times I sort of tried him out—called to him; but he knew I trusted him. You got to trust a hunting-dog knowing what he's about. If you lose faith in him he knows it; you bet he does.

Well, sir, you know, Bowlegs worked up and down that side-hill. Sometimes I thought he was after a fox, for a fresh fox-track is an awful temptation to a fox-hound, and one that don't like muskrat-hunting much, and does it only because he's an accommodating dog, knowing his owner wants to hunt rats, even if rats are kind of low-down sport.

So I went up there to see what he was doing, and all of a sudden I heard him baying whatever it was, and, my gracious, I bet you wouldn't think in a year what Bowlegs was doing. He had a mink! Yes, sir, he'd holed a mink, and I sold the hide for six dollars, even if it was early for mink hides. My, but that made me admire Bowlegs!

It just seemed as though I hadn't begun to appreciate that dog. I hadn't either. You can see for yourself, he's a fine-looking dog. Look at his ears—ain't they dandies? And his plume—you never saw a nicer tail on a dog than that!

And his paws are big. I've seen dogs with small paws that were all right other ways, but they couldn't stand up, especially snow-tracking. Big paws hold a dog up, and being fuzzy, they wear good in the snow.

Bowlegs never has a sore paw—never! Oh, well, once or twice in hard, mean snow-crust he'd cut a toe or something like that, but not what I'd call a sore paw. You take a barefoot dog, no hair on his paws, and they get so sore they limp on all four paws. But Bowlegs hasn't hardly limped at all since I had him.

Well, sir, when Bowlegs chased that mink I was waked right up. I knew there was something behind that, but I couldn't

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seem to figure it out. I'd sit by the fire to home, and look at Bowlegs, evenings, and wonder.

And my wife, you know, she'd talk about the young guns, or something some woman told her that day, or something, and I suppose that bothered me getting the rights of Bowlegs, what was behind his chasing that mink when we were muskratting. Well, I was stumped. I couldn't figure it out, not then.

As I said, I begun to have my suspicions he was a natural-born fur dog. He looks kind of rough, kind of hardy, sort of fighting and sort of like he was in big business—you know what I mean!

He don't pay no 'tention to common folks or things. But you take a man that looks like a good hunter, and watch Bowlegs. Bowlegs'll call the bluff of a lot of these gun-store stool hunters quicker than any dog or man I ever knowed; yes he will!

LET me tell you. You know, lot of us fellows been hunting up above the Slippery Dam Road. You know that country. Over toward the east is a big swamp, and the main creek comes out of the Gorge to the north, and the Big Woods lie all around, except toward the northwest where the line of clearings follows the road. Great country for rabbits, and we always go up there hunting.

Course, I had Bowlegs up there, and Pete Cilbers had his Aunt Fannie, and Jim Torrance had his Freckle Mutt, and, oh, we had a lot of those kind of dogs along, and men, so we went into the swamp on the first snow, to run rabbits. Bowlegs he was kind of disgusted, the way a good dog is when a pack of mongrels is yapping around. I seen the way he looked, and it wa'n't but a little while and he'd worked off north, along the lake, by himself.

The other dogs were yapping, and the boys were hollering at them over east of me. Oh, they jumped two-three rabbits, and one came along, and I banged him.

What do you know about Pete Cilbers? He claimed that rabbit account of his Aunt Fannie having jumped and run him. I was just disgusted, too, and we paying him a dollar or two apiece to take us up in his automobile—but I gave him the rabbit. That's the way I felt about it. I just gave it to him.

Well, course, his Aunt Fannie see Bowlegs working and she horned in on him, hurrying him and losing the tracks, and just making a lot of motions that didn't mean anything. Cilbers said there wasn't anything there, and the ground was too wet, and him wearing low shoes and breaking through, so he called off his dog, and I was glad to see him go back into the cut-overs and high country, leaving me to hunt Bowlegs.

I studied where Bowlegs was working. The snow was fresh, but I could see him poke his nose into the snow and around the brush and all over. He didn't act rabbity, and he didn't act foxy. It kind of worried me; you see, that's deer country up above there, and take a dog that's once run a deer, and he's awful hard to break of the habit.

I kept close to him as I could, and cut a whip to whale him if it was a deer; but he worked careful and swinging pretty wide; and then all of a sudden he raised his nose into the wind, out of the northwest, and away he went.

He'd caught a wind-scent. I'd never seen him do that before. But there he was taking the wind, and I right after him, bounding and a-climbing. He went right over to the creek. You know the creek, along there. The head the Slippery Dam flow's all marsh, and then a lot of alders, and above that the rock gorge.

Well, sir, when he hit the creek, he lammed right into the alders, and he was beginning to open up as he got there, whining, squealing, so blamed eager he couldn't bark out loud.

It beat me all to pieces. I thought it was perhaps another mink, remembering the way he's acted that other time down to Sunbeam Gulf, but he acted different—a lot different; and he barked different, too, kind of doubtful, like he was puzzled himself. You know, you get so when a dog barks, it's regular talk to you. You know all about what his feelings are anyhow, even if you don't exactly understand what it is all about.

Well, he hit into the creek, swam across, worked up the other side, and yelping once in a while, and then all of a sudden he give a regular he-bark. The next minute he was making music like his heart was bursting with joy. He was having the time of his life apparently, so I listened, and wondered what on earth he was chasing up the creek.

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I cut across the hill to the head of the gorge, and he was echoing among those rocks there. He kept a-coming, and by gosh, I thought it was a deer water-trailing, trying to fool Bowlegs. I stood there and I slipped in some BB's.; but I knowed better, too, than to shoot a deer, being against the law.

Then I saw something black, just like that. I couldn't make out what it was.

I couldn't shoot yet, and I waited. He come about thirty yards from me, plowing right up the creek, along the bank. So I lammed him.

Yes, sir, it was an otter! Bowlegs came right up on his trail, in and out the water. I was surprized!

Well, as I knew Bowlegs, being unexpected, it took me all of a heap. He was a fur dog! No mistake, now! Just a natural-born fur dog.

And what do you think? Pete Cilbers when he seen the hide claimed I ought to divide up with all the boys, account of us hunting together; but I didn't. And me paying him, too, for bringing me out, and him claiming the rabbit account of his Aunt Fannie jumping and running it! You know how some men are, just regular hogs.

Bowlegs had me stumped. I looked at him, and I looked at him. Where in the world had he got to otter-trailing? So I took him down to Charlie Maltby's and asked him. He said probably a veterinary might know, so I went to Doc Brocket and Doc Roe, but they couldn't tell me. You see, they know dogs all right, what to do for 'em.

But I couldn't figure out Bowlegs' ideas in the matter. Finally I wrote to H-T-T * and asked them. The man who answers questions wrote back and asked me if Bowlegs had any Airedale into him. I wondered what that had to do with it, but I wrote back he had, and bulldog too, and I thought some rough-coat spaniel too, but he was a grayish dog.

Well, sir, you know, that man wrote right back, quick's that, and said the Airedale blood probably accounted for it. Airedales, he said—and I'd never known it before—was developed out of English otter-hounds, and probably Bowlegs was instinctively an otter-hound, account of the old English breed, which was Airedale, after the Duke of Airedale who bred them.

Now look't that! There's that feller, 'way off there what never seen Bowlegs, and him suspicioning what it might be! That got me. My land! But those magazine fellows must be awful intelligent!

Well, sir, I sold that otter hide for twenty-eight dollars spot cash. You can believe me I thought a lot of Bowlegs then. He was a fur dog. I never pretended he was anything else. He'd run rabbits, and two or three times I had him out, treeing partridges. He was good at that; but when he hit a fox track, of course, it was all off, and you might's well put in BB's instead of your sixes.

Lots of foxes around. Never see so many tracks in my life! Bowlegs and me had sport, I tell you. Work wasn't much for me to do, so I had time to run around quite a bit, and I had Bowlegs out about all a man ought to have his dog running.

By good rights a man ought to have two or three dogs. Then when he wants to hunt every day he can run first one, then the other, so they won't tire out.

Gracious! If I could only have two dogs like Bowlegs! I wouldn't ask any more than that! No, sir! Then a man could make a business, you might say, of hunting, especially fur-hunting.

WHAT I was going to tell you, though, when I started to speak, was about my experience with Bowlegs up on the Woodlot Hills. You know them. That's the range down the river, and on this side. All the hills has woodlots on them, and there's two or three big gulfs over there, with little creeks in them. Best fox country in these parts.

One day I was over there and Bowlegs nosed into the undergrowth, when all of a sudden he give a yell, right out. Biff—and I see him streaking it like he never done before. In a minute or two I seen it was a fox—saw the track, and the biggest track I ever had seen. I cut in and waited. The fox led away, and was away out of hearing, for about an hour, and then he come sneaking and circling back.

I expected to see him every minute. I looked, and I had my old automatic all ready. And by gosh, he run right along, through a kind of a little hollow, out of sight. But I seen him, about two hundred yards off, just as plain as day! Yes, sir!

* *Hunter-trader-trapper.*

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He was a black fox. I hope to die, I almost fell down, I was so surprized. No wonder Bowlegs let a yell when he saw him.

It was all off with me then. Nothing would do but I must get that old fox. Oh, boy, but he was pretty!

There he was, right up there on the back of the pasture knoll, where the runway leads. There was a crust on the snow; but it was thawing, so it held the scent good, and the sun shone on the snow and on him, too—you could see him shine! My gracious! I stood on my tiptoes. So I sicked Bowlegs on, and they circled, and I tried to head him.

You know how it is fox-hunting. There's always three or four runways they can come through, and when you are alone you don't have much chance of hitting the right one. But I tried it. I went to a farmhouse to stay that night, and next day Bowlegs and I went again. I'd caught Bowlegs just after dark. I didn't know what the woman would think, but I knew what she'd think if I got that black fox.

I was afraid somebody else would see him, too. So I went right after him. Well, you know I jumped him about two o'clock that afternoon and we had a race; but it come on a rain, and it was all off. Dog lost the scent, and he couldn't sight-track account of that smart, old scoundrel running in roads and along the top of stone fences.

I told my wife about him. She said it wasn't any excuse for me letting her think I'd broke my neck in Colander Gulf or somewhere. She knew I never was hurt but once, for I'm careful. I don't take any chances, pulling a loaded gun through wire fences, or anything. And that time I broke my leg in Sunbeam Gulf I'd been all right, only I slipped.

Anyhow I was just about crazy about that black fox. I dreamed about him, and one night my wife belted me with her shoe, because I thought I was running after him, and me lying on my back in the bed. You know how it is when a man gets real enthusiastic about anything.

Well, I didn't mind anything she said. I knew that fox was worth five hundred dollars, or maybe a thousand. You couldn't tell till you looked at the fur how much he was worth. But a friend of mine had some good fox-traps, triple grips and jumps and all those kind, coil springs and flat springs, and so on, and I put out some of those, right around in Icicle Ledges, and over the hills. I set water-sets, curiosity-sets, medicine-bait and bait-sets. I wanted that fox.

Seemed just as though I caught everything but that black fox. I ketched white weasels, wild housecats, owls, skunks, muskrats, mink, and then I caught two or three foxes, too. But if I did get eight-ten dollars for the foxes, they wa'n't no more to me than 'coons or anything. All I could think of was that black fox, and you know, Bowlegs was the same as me.

We were just like regular old friends about that black fox. Even when we'd come in at night all tired out, and probably wet and hungry—my, but I was hungry sometimes!—we'd set there by the stove, and no matter if the woman was mad and talking, Bowlegs would look up at me, and I'd look down at him. I tell you, that dog understands!

Course, my wife wouldn't believe there was any black fox. I had a trap set into his den. He come out, and dragged his tail, and the trap got about ten hairs out of his plume. I showed 'em to her, and she wouldn't believe it then. Said it was a skunk.

Course, I didn't tell anybody about my knowing where a black fox was. If that had got around, why a lot of these hunters around here would have gone crazy about him. Some men don't have no sense in their heads about such things anyhow.

Well, I bet we was over there thirty times, looking for that black fox. Bowlegs knew just about it, same as I did. I remember one day we worked up through Icicle Gulf, and didn't start anything. Then we went over the divide and dragged Rolling Stone Gulf—that's a mean one to hunt!

Well, Bowlegs jumped something in there, and I had a good look at it—a nice, big, red fox. He led off about half an hour, circled, and come back. They were heading right straight for me, and then all of a sudden Bowlegs pulled off sharp to the west end went slow-trailing along, barking. I knew the minute his voice changed he'd lost the hot red-fox track.

I went over there to look, and sure enough, there was a fox track in the thin snow on the crust, not very plain. There was the fresh, running red-fox track, too.

Say, but I was mad! Since when had Bowlegs took to leaving a hot track for a

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cold one? If I could have caught Bowlegs then I could have whaled him. Sometimes even the best of dogs needs a lesson.

Well, I cut over north to where there was a high-knoll runway, and where I could hear good and see. I saw Bowlegs about half a mile away, on the side of another ridge. He went into a woodlot, and out of it. Into another woodlot, and out of that one, too, and then around to the right, and into a gully there, filled with cedars.

There he jumped him. Wow! How he did let go with his tongue then! I was mad. Course, I was! Who wouldn't be, having a dog waste two-three hours working up a cold trail, when he had a hot one right under his nose!

So I walked about two miles over, to another runway, and as I come up to it I was sick. If I'd only been two minutes sooner, I'd been right there. Bowlegs had old Blackie right there in front of him! That old shiny scoundrel was romping along, looking first over one shoulder, and then over the other.

I declare! If I'd had a good rifle I'd 'a' got him. He was just out of shotgun range, though—'most two hundred yards; and he seen me, and flipped his big tail, big's a stove-pipe, and away they went.

Twice that day I come into runways between him and the dog, and then he denned up over in the limestones of Icicle Gulf, and I stayed with Bowlegs till he come. I made up my mind then that I'd stay with that dog, if he stayed out all night.

It don't do a dog any good if you go home and leave him. He loses confidence in you. He expects you to stay with him if he stays with you. Oh, they know if a man ain't a sticker.

You take Cilbers now. That man would spoil the best dog that ever lived, just because he'll run a dog out twenty miles in an automobile, hunt him hard, and then if the dog ain't around the minute he's ready to start for home, away he goes, and the dog can walk home twenty miles, all tired out, and probably hungry too. That ain't no way to treat a dog.

And you can bet, after two-three experiences like that a dog's going to be to the automobile when it's time to start for home; yessir, if he has to leave a hot rabbit track to do it, the dog'll be there, and he's a ruined dog for hunting, too. It makes a dog lazy to hunt with a man that ain't a sticker. But I hang to it, and I don't care how many times a dog goes home and leaves me, I never go home and leave a dog.

Well, sir, that old Blackie got so he knowed me 'n' Bowlegs. I seen Torrance's Freckled Mutt pick up Blackie's trail one day over in the Woodlot Hills, right by Myendorf's farm. Blackie was about half a mile ahead. Blackie played along ahead for probably two-three miles, and then he was sick of it. Freckled Mutt wasn't interesting, and so Blackie just took to some bare ice in the creek, cut across into a stone fence with bare top, and lost him.

I seen it plain, afraid all the time perhaps Torrance would see that black fox, and blab it all over the country. But he didn't. I worked Freckled Mutt into a red-fox track about half an hour later, and I shot him, and we split fifty-fifty on the hide, for Torrance happened to come up just then.

So that's the way it run till along after the January thaw. My wife said I wasn't paying any attention to anything much, but I knew what I was doing, and I told her so too. But it made it kind of disagreeable; you know how that is. Go work all day, probaby walk twenty-thirty miles, and likely have hard luck, or miss a shot you ought to have hit—something like that, and come home and find your woman mad.

But I didn't say anything. I knew I was going to show her. Twice I had whacks at Old Blackie. Once it was out of range, and the other time I was excited. I admit it! Fine shot, too good a shot, and I was careless—and I missed clean.

Bowlegs came up, and when he come to where the shot had glanced along in the crust and loose snow-frost, he stopped and sniffed. He looked at those shot-marks, and then he smelled of the tracks. He looked around at me— I hope to die he did—and give a little yip, crossed about fifty yards to a red-fox track and begun to back-track it. Yes, sir! I never was so insulted in my life, but I had to laugh. He back-trailed far enough so I knew what he meant, and then he come wagging his tail to me and shaking himself, he wagged so much, laughing and being good-natured even if I had missed a five-hundred-dollar shot.

A week afterwards we were over there It was the third time we had been that

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week, too, and so we knew about where the old fellow would be. Sure enough, we jumped him in Icicle Gulf, and he circled.

I eenie-meenie-mina-moed on the runways, and I hit for the head of the gulf. There's kind of a sag there in the hollow, with scattering cedar-trees and open places. Take a fox in those parts, and he's sure to come back either down the bottoms or down one side or the other.

I knew a dead beech stub to stand by, and I waited there, all ready. Bowlegs was barking right along. I could hear him going, and then he turned and almost went out of hearing around Four-Corner Hill. Then he come back, closer and closer.

I stood there, looking three ways at once, and all of a sudden I see something, and, I hope to die, there he was. Well, I didn't forget how I'd missed, and now I had a real shot. He was looking back. I got my old gun up, and she's a daisy, that gun! I never had a gun as reliable as that before! I let go, and Old Blackie gave one jump up, turned around three or four times, and then stood right there, head up, tail curved, and looking.

It wa'n't but for just a minute. The sun shone on his hair and made it shine, and the wind blew through his fur. As long as I live I'll never forget him, the way he stood there, and then he turned around slow, three times. I didn't shoot. I killed too many foxes not to know what was the matter. Then he laid down, curled his tail around, and put his nose on his flank—died! Yes, sir, just like he was going to sleep.

Bowlegs came bounding up, and stopped short looking at that dead black fox. He went and smelled him, and then he looked at me. Yes, sir, Old Blackie was dead, and you know, doggone it, I felt sorry. I did, honest! And Bowlegs came over and I patted him on the head.

Well, I carried Blackie down Main Street, believe me I did. I stopped to Malty's and the Ann Street Garage, and showed him. I took him home and showed him to my wife. She didn't know what he meant, course. She give a look and a sniff, and went on washing dishes same as usual.

I told her maybe I'd get a hundred for him, and she wasn't interested. I said two-fifty, and she shrugged her shoulder, and I said may be five-six hundred.

And I said I was going to go to Bluffsteins and buy that automobile he had. I thought she'd like that. You see, if I had an automobile I'd be good and fresh, and so would the dog, when we got to the hunting-grounds, instead of being all wore out going, and worse yet coming home.

Well, say, you know, I never was so surprized in my life! My wife just tore the roof off. She did! She slammed around. She broke two teacups, and she abused Bowlegs. She did! She abused him shameful. She's been doing it right along ever since.

Course, when I'm around I can't stand for it, and I won't; but when I'm away, working, or not hunting, or anything, she don't treat that dog right. She says I think more of that dog than I do of her. She does, honest!

Well, you know women. You can't argue with them. Seems like they ain't got no sense anyhow. And she says if I don't get rid of Bowlegs I'll lose her. Maybe you won't believe it, but that's so.

She said to me:

"You Det Singer, if you don't get rid of that dog, you get rid of me now; I want you to understand that! I shan't live in the same house with that dog!"

I didn't think she meant it, but you know women. If you think they mean it, they're mad if you take 'em to their word. And then some time when you think they're fooling, they're so deadly in earnest— Well, my wife went down to her sister's house, and so I come over here to see 'f you don't want to trade your setter-hound for him? Yes, sir, I told you the truth, how it is.

There's Bowlegs, the best natural-born fur dog I ever saw, and there ain't a thing the matter with him, except my wife's took a prejudice to him. And he'd leave a red-fox track to take a black one! Think of it!

And my wife won't have him in the same house with her. By gosh! I'm 'most crazy! But you see how it is! You can't argue none, with a woman. I hate to let him go—but you see how it is. I got to do it!

Rasbbett, the fur-buyer, paid me four hundred and fifty dollars for that black foxskin. Me shooting him with shot took two hundred and fifty dollars off the value too; but I was satisfied. I hadn't any complaint to make. My land! If my wife'd only be reasonable—but you know women! An' now, just when I got the dog I want and need—well, how'll you trade?

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THE AVENGER

by J.D.Newsom

Author of "The Naked Truth," "Bad Luck," etc.

HOUR after hour, squatting cross-legged high up on the rock-strewn hillside above Dombari, Soardi remained motionless, gazing down at the sleepy settlement beneath him. The scattered houses and the patchwork of cultivated fields lay in a hollow facing the Pacific, which stretched out immense, flat and sapphire blue. Behind him in a tumbled, chaotic mass arose the jagged hilltops of New Caledonia, sharp and clear against the cloudless sky.

But Soardi's eyes were blind to the beauty of the scene and his head was bowed on his breast while tears rolled down his yellow cheeks. He was only a Javanese coolie, only an indentured laborer, but pain comes even to the humblest of men, and Soardi, alone on the rock-strewn hillside gave way to his grief and cried softly, hopelessly until the rays of the fast-sinking sun transformed him into a thing of gold a still, carven image of grief.

Somewhere across that immense waste of water lay Java, and his village and the rice-fields overhung at this hour by soft gray mists. Children would be playing before the thatched houses, their bamboo bells tinkling in unison—

The sun dropped down into the sea and the tiny clouds on the horizon became pulsating, bloodshot things, like stabs of vivid pain in the enormous body of night.

"Ohél" whispered Soardi. "There is only one Right Way, but—but I am too weak. I can not forget. *Ohél"*

He shivered a little as the night-wind wandering down from the hills rustled and fluttered about him.

The fires at home would be alight now. Women would be singing their children to sleep. There would be a murmur of low voices, laughter—

He had left all that peaceful comfort a year before, all for the sake of the promised wages. Three little years they had told him at the recruiting-office, and he would return a rich man, able to own his own fields. How he had laughed when the old people had urged him to stay at home, to wait for his father's house and land. But he had just been married and little Nji Santi, all sunlight and smiles, had agreed to journey with him to this land of wealth. Would she not also acquire money? Then they could buy more land and, perhaps send their children to the big Dutch school at Serang.

And now he was an indentured laborer, to be fined and imprisoned, to be worked and used at his master's will. Three years—and Nji Santi had been sent away—sold

Soardi slipped off the rock and pattered down the hillside toward the lights of Dombari. His face was stolid and impassive now, even his eyes were inscrutable. He reached the homestead of his master

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Talukdar Kunwar, and quickly made his way to the coolie lines where he washed himself and carefully adjusted his baggy yellow trousers, his tight-fitting white coat and his batik-work head-cloth. Then he trotted off to the grove by the river where his fellow coolies assembled nightly to gossip and gamble.

They made room for him about the fire and he squatted down, crossing his legs beneath him.

"You are late Soardi," said a round-faced boy. "We waited half an hour before the first draw, then knowing the ways of your master we decided to begin, thinking you would be kept at some task."

"It was not work," answered Soardi. "Talukdar Kunwar has sent Nji Santi away——"

"O-ho!" breathed the coolies. "Sent Nji Santi away!"

Soardi's face was an expressionless mask.

"Sent her away to Nouméa," he went on, "where she is to be a servant in an eating-house. He was given two thousand francs for her.

"Now, I was not consulted though she is my wife, and she must serve the rest of her time in that city."

"That is bad," nodded an old man who had spent his younger days in Nouméa and knew its seamy side all too well.

"It is bad," agreed Soardi. "And when I said to Talukdar, 'Nji Santi is my wife and contracted to serve with me,' he beat me with a stick and called out curses in his own tongue until the stick cracked. Then he told me to keep away from him for one whole day lest he go mad and kill me.

"I should like to slip a kris between his ribs—but the white people would say it was murder."

"*Aiel*" sighed the old man. "Talukdar is a devil and the police will not believe us. I remember when he first came to the island from his home in India. He was a laborer then, cringing and fawning on the whites, crawling until he gained favor and money to buy his plantation. Some day they will come to know him."

"And Santi," brooded Soardi "left this morning——"

"What will you do now?" asked a boy with a thin, black mustache. He was a newcomer, strong and hardy, not easily abashed, who had not yet realized the meaning of indentured labor.

"He can do nothing," retorted the old man. "If he goes to his wife he is a deserter to be fined and imprisoned. If he complains to the *gendarme* he will be told that he has no wife, that Santi is a laborer. They will produce papers to prove this, and Soardi would be fined if he made an outcry. I know."

"That is the speech of a weak man," cried the boy. "Do you think I would allow such things to be done to me? *I* would go to Nouméa."

Soardi bowed his head to hide the agony in his eyes. Never in his life had he raised a hand in anger against a fellow creature. He had loved flowers and sunsets and the speculative discussions of the village elders. He had loved children and his wife. Hatred was a very new thing to him, born only a moment ago.

"*Aiel*" he whispered. "And what would Talukdar not do to us both? How many have not already suffered in his house?"

There came a hush while the fire crackled and the wind rustled in the trees overhead. Then the old man sprang to his feet.

"O Soardi," he cried, "there is one way. My days are empty before me. My fines are so heavy that I can never hope to see my home again. My time has come. Go to Talukdar and say:

" 'Bring back Nji Santi to me and we shall serve you honorably until our time expires. Refuse, and I shall have you cursed by the ghost of old Kanidja.' "

"Go now. I shall follow."

He stood stiffly before his companions looking from impassive countenance to impassive countenance.

"That is Soardi's due," gravely said the boy with the black mustache. "All is now in perfect order."

Soardi knelt before the old man and patted his feet.

"Kanidja," he whispered, "may your path across the last bridge be sure and swift. I shall go to Talukdar."

He slipped away into the darkness and hurried toward his master's bungalow. In the deep shadows of the veranda he paused, irresolute. Through the open window he saw Talukdar sprawling, ungirt and slovenly, in a wicker chair.

He was a great, fat man, slow and ponderous with muscles of steel beneath the oily smoothness of his brown-skinned arms. His black beard framed a puffy face where

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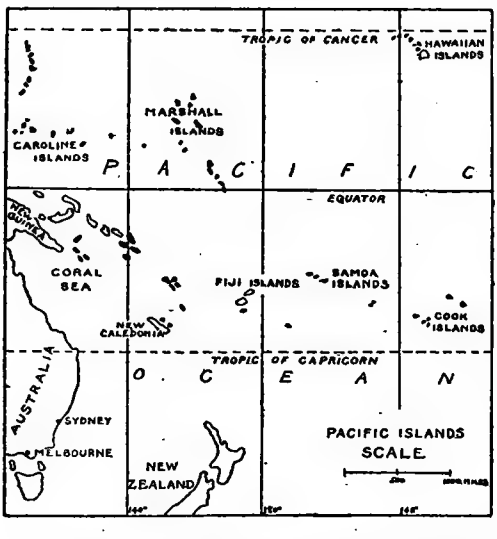
cunning eyes glowed beneath long silken lashes a woman might have envied.

In India he had been a writer, the son of a crafty *Bahnia*, but he had grown up without creed or faith or mercy and early in life he had been outcast, flung out to mingle with the pariahs, the sweepers and the scavengers.

He had grasped at the chance to leave India for this remote French possession and now—behold Talukdar Kunwar, landowner, supplier of fruit and vegetables to Nouméa, with a growing account at the Banque de l'Indo-Chine!

He boasted often that some day he would go back to Peshawar and smash his family and their kin, smash them utterly financially and morally—wipe them out.



In the mean time, here in New Caledonia he was prospering mightily, even though the Japanese settlers were pressing him close. They had even tried to outbid him for the supply of market produce to the barracks! But he had wisely lent money to the storekeeper who hastily renewed the contract when Talukdar, between jests, reminded him of his debt. Since then, however, he had grown to hate all these little yellow men. He lumped them all together—Japanese and Chinese and Javanese. They were all one to him—yellow curs who never dared snap back.

As he lolled in his chair he counted the greasy notes he had received for the transfer of Nji Santi. A transfer! What hypocrisy among these white men. It was a sale—as one might dispose of a cow or a horse. That transfer had bitten deep into the soul of Nji Santi and her ridiculous little husband.

Talukdar chuckled until his belly shook with silent mirth, then he stuffed the notes into his girdle, stood up and shuffled across to the sideboard where he kept his whisky. There came a tap at the door as he uncorked the bottle.

"Come in!" he called out. "Ah, Soardi," he went on as the Javanese entered the room, "the day is not yet done. I told you to keep away, to take a rest. What is it now?" He spoke banteringly, well-pleased at the slow torture he was inflicting on the coolie.

Soardi's pupils contracted to pin-points and the throbbing artery in his throat seemed to choke him, but he spoke coldly, dispassionately as befits a bearer of bad news.

"Master," he said, "you have sent Nji Santi to Nouméa. This was wrong and against our understanding."

"Must I listen to this again?" asked Talukdar, smiling broadly. "I told you to be comforted by the fact that in two years you will be reunited. Nji will, no doubt, accumulate considerable sums."

"The future," answered Soardi, groping for French words, "is always veiled. But this is an order: Bring back Nji or send me to her. Together we shall labor faithfully. If not," his voice rose a little, "then Kanidja is ready to die and his ghost——"

"Oh, enough you fool," shouted Talukdar, who feared all spirits and secretly propitiated them. "That is a tale for old women."

"His ghost," Soardi went on remorselessly, "will make your life——"

"*Shabbash!*" yelled Talukdar, trembling at the curse. "Stop or I shall beat you senseless!"

Then as Soardi's mouth framed another word, he hurled the whisky bottle at him. It missed its mark and burst in a hundred pieces against the wall. "Be still," ordered Talukdar.

"His ghost will never leave you by day or by night," Soardi's even voice droned on.

Talukdar rushed at the coolie and, seizing him by the throat, swung him off his feet.

"*Aré!*" he snarled. "You would put a curse on me? Take that——"

He paused, his clenched fist drawn back

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for a voice came from the darkness of the veranda.

"The prayer of the dying," thought Soardi when the voice reached him above the pounding of the blood in his ears. "Kanidja is here."

"I am going now, Soardi," he heard the old man call out. Then Talukdar's grip relaxed, and he fell all in a heap on the ground.

The Hindu strode across his body to the door, which he flung open and in the broad beam of light lay Kanidja, face downwards, naked to the waist, a great red stain spreading slowly beneath him. He was still conscious and he groaned as his head rolled from side to side.

"Not here!" shouted Talukdar. "Do not die here!"

And he tried to kick the dying man out into the night, for the custom of committing suicide to plague an enemy is practised by the Banjaris of India and Talukdar had heard terrible tales of such happenings in Peshawar.

The sprawling body rolled against the veranda railing and in desperate haste Talukdar bent down, caught Kanidja by the shoulders and started to drag him across the threshold, which protects a house against evil spirits. But Kanidja's head fell back and the open glazing eyes fixed Talukdar in the unswerving stare of death.

Clenching his teeth the Hindu threw the body clear of the house out on to the footpath. He spoke very quickly to recover his composure.

"Soardi," he said, "go summon the other coolies at once. That man was working for Monsieur Denclos. I must have him notified. Also the *gendarme*—when he returns to his post.

"You, I shall deal with later. But if you imagine I am to be frightened by such silly things, you are mistaken. Go!"

Soon twenty flickering lights danced in the night, and the news spread from plantation to plantation.

"Talukdar Kunwar is damned. Old Kanidja's spirit walks by his side."

Monsieur Denclos arrived before dawn to identify the body just before it was thrown into a grave scratched in a corner of the horse paddock.

"The old fellow should have died at home," he told Talukdar as they sipped white wine after the burial. "He was never much good that one—violent and difficult to handle."

"These people!" sighed Talukdar who could pose as an unbeliever in the light of day. "They are ridiculous, full of superstitions. Ah, well, we must do our best for them I suppose. But it is thankless."

"Quite," agreed Denclos, "quite thankless."

WHEN he was left alone Talukdar drank heavily to steady his nerves, but an atmosphere of breathless expectancy seemed to pervade the house. There was an absence of noise, a brooding stillness which rang in his ears. After lunch he summoned Soardi, who entered the room stolid and impassive as ever.

"Well, Soardi," said Talukdar, slapping his thigh in forced amusement, "I am waiting for your friend's visitation." He smiled, but his eyes were cruel. "You, however, caused this unpleasant thing to happen here and deprived me of a night's sleep. For this you must be punished or I shall not be able to put up with you for another two years. You would like to go to Nouméa to your charming wife? Very well, you shall go the other way, to Ramona, with the gang which is to put up the windmill. That will keep you occupied and I shall tell François, the overseer, to keep you busy. And if you give any trouble, *mon petit*, I shall tell the *gendarme*. You shall rot in prison."

Talukdar paused, well-pleased with himself. He lighted a cigaret and flicked the match at Soardi.

"Why should I not say that you killed Kanidja? Would any one doubt my word? And who would believe yours?

"Now go and be still or——"

He laughed in Soardi's face and snapped his fingers.

A blind surge of hate ran riot through the coolie's veins. His despair gave way to something infinitely more terrible and dangerous, but he stood expressionless and motionless.

"I shall not ask again," he murmured. "You shall measure out your own punishment."

In the blinding heat of mid-afternoon the overseer led his party across the hills to Ramona and Talukdar left alone in the silent house brooded and drank himself into a state where anything might well happen.

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The creaking of a board, the scuttling lizards in the roof made him quake, and when one of the kitchen boys dropped a plate he gnawed at his knuckles to keep from crying aloud.

The day dragged by and night with its terrors came swiftly. Talukdar in the privacy of his bedroom burnt incense before his household gods. But Fate decreed that the spluttering sulfur-match in his shaking fingers should fall on to the reed carpet which flared up fiercely, choking him with acrid smoke. He beat down the flames with the bedspread, and the flying cloth brought the little mud gods clattering to the ground where they broke and crumbled. Talukdar cursed, and the fear in his heart grew and grew until every shadow seemed haunted and he heard the dead man chuckling hoarsely in every rustle of the palm-trees about the house.

He sat with his back to the wall in the living-room, a gun on his knees, waiting in hysterical dread for he knew not what awful thing. He would not give in, he would not return the two thousand francs he had received for that woman. He would make Soardi suffer. He would kill Soardi—that was the best thing to do—kill Soardi and thus show the ghost how little he feared it.

Then something struck a window-pane. It flew into a thousand noisy fragments which took an eternity to fall to the ground. Talukdar, his eyes bulging with fear, his mouth agape, shrieked, fired at random, and fainted in his chair where the panic-stricken house-servants found him the next morning, snoring drunkenly.

MEANWHILE Soardi, keeping to the wooded hilltops hurried on toward Nouméa. He had gone docilely to Ramona, but in the night, biding his time, he had stolen the overseer's rifle and fled through the bush, pausing only to cast a stone through the window of his master's bungalow—a sign and a warning.

At dusk the next afternoon he reached the heights overlooking Nouméa and, having left his rifle in a thicket, he made his way down into the native quarter where the men of a hundred tribes and nations live huddled and squalid lives. There are to be found the Malay and the Arab, the Nayar and the Cantonese, the brawling sailor and the debased ex-convict from the *bagne* on l'isle Nou just across the harbor from Nouméa. Every creed and color has been brought into labor in the nickel and chrome-mines and on the coffee-plantations. It is a backwash of a turbid stream of humanity, little known, mysterious and dangerous.

Soardi dodged and crept from shadow to shadow intent on avoiding the police patrols, for no native is allowed on the streets after nightfall without a permit. At last he reached a tumble-down shanty known to every coolie on the island, the store of Émile Biche, forger, ex-convict, liberated from the penitentiary none quite knew how many years before. He was incredibly old. His bald head tapered upwards and thin whisps of white hair hung down limply on to his greasy collar. Red-rimmed, weak eyes looked out from beneath shaggy brows and his toothless mouth was compressed until it was all but hidden by his heavy, formless nose.

Ostensibly he sold beads and bits of carved ivory and charms to the Kanakas; infrequent tourists were taken to his shop and he would smile his senile smile and tell them about his halcyon days when he had driven his own team of chestnuts at the Arles horseshow in 1873; but in reality Émile Biche dealt in human lives. He bought and sold men and women. Did a Kanaka chief desire an almond-eyed wife? He sent word to Biche. Did a blackbirder need twenty strong laborers for some plantation at the back of beyond? Biche found them without fuss or delay. If a *restaurateur* required servants, Biche, again, knew where to get just the type required without having recourse to the inquisitive immigration bureau.

Soardi found him sitting behind his cluttered counter, his white soft hands playing with some glass beads heaped on a black lacquer tray.

"What is it?" drearily mumbled Biche. "The shop is closed at this time of day. Come tomorrow."

Soardi closed the door behind him and came up to the counter.

"I have not come to buy—" he began.

"No?" said Biche in the same dreary voice. "You want the pleasure of my company?"

He twisted around the reflector on the single oil-lamp until the light rested full on Soardi's face.

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"And yet I do not remember seeing you before."

"Two days ago," murmured Soardi, "Talukdar Kunwar of Dombari sold you a girl, Nji Santi. Now, Nji Santi is my wife, and it is urgent that I should find her."

Biche groped for something in a drawer beneath the counter before answering.

"Oh, recriminations!" he grumbled half-aloud. "Always they recriminate. There is no tranquility——

"But," he went on addressing Soardi. "I can not help you. I do not know this Kunwar. I do not buy women. You have made a mistake. I sell souvenirs and *objets de vertu.*"

He laughed dismally and wiped his eyes when the laugh became a cough.

"Before you go would you like to see some cheap and pretty cloths?"

Soardi, with the patience of all the East, slowly shook his head.

"I heard your name whispered when first I came to this island. There is no mistake," he said evenly.

"I forget," mumbled Biche. "I forget so easily. I am so old!"

"This—" he suddenly brought out a blunt automatic pistol and laid it by the side of the lacquer tray—"is my one safeguard. You see, I am weak. I have to guard against the rashness of youth. Pardon me if it alarms you. Go quietly to the door, please —unless you wish to buy something?"

"I have a little money," answered Soardi, keeping his eyes on the gun. "I could pay——"

"Ha!" chuckled Biche. "Money—the curse of Dives! Now let me see—I am so old—I forget."

He sat back lost in the shadows, and Soardi waited stolidly. A slight sound behind him made him turn his head sharply.

"Yes," murmured Biche, "that is my attendant. He watches from that dark corner. I am so old and weak——

"Now how much money would you give for this bead?"

He held up a cheap bit of green glass between his soft fingers.

"You would find the markings thereon priceless."

"Yes?" urged Soardi..

"You understand?" Biche's mouth twisted into a semblance of a smile. "I can not keep my records in books, but this—this is an invaluable document."

"And its price?"

"As I said—invaluable. But for you, who are young and want it badly, a price might be fixed. A thousand francs?"

Soardi shook his head. This devil was playing with him. If he could snatch away the gun he might be able to force an answer out of him.

"It is too much," he said, coming closer to the counter. "But if I may look at the gem and read the inscription, I would give all I have—a hundred and fifty francs."

Biche tossed the bead back on to the tray and shuffled it into the pile.

"I had forgotten," he mumbled. "Talukdar is a useful friend. How could I think of dealing with one of his coolies? I should be in bed at this hour. Save your money," he flung at Soardi. "When you have a thousand francs come to me again if I am still alive."

Soardi felt weary and tired. To have risked so much and now to be cornered, to be helpless before this doddering ancient. There was one last chance—

He bowed his head.

"I shall come back—" he said and turned to go.

But like a flash he spun around, leaped forward and his hand closed on the stock of the automatic before Biche could move. He jumped across the counter and pressed the gun against the old man's neck.

"Tell him to be still," he ordered as the Kanaka guard lunged out of the shadows.

"Go back, Moissiki," said Biche in the same dreary voice.

"I want the name of the place where Nji Santi is to be found," snapped Soardi, now a mass of unleashed energy. "Tell!"

Biche laughed, coughed and wiped his eyes, apparently indifferent to the cold steel pressed close behind his ear.

"Sometimes I remember things. Yes, Talukdar did mention a girl. She is at the *Belle Étoile*, out on the La Coulée road. A perfectly respectable place. You have no cause for alarm."

"*Belle Étoile*," repeated Soardi. "Swear to it."

"Oh!" Biche shrugged his shoulders. "This is childish—I swear."

The gun muzzle lifted from his neck, and Soardi slid across the counter and backed along the wall toward the door. He could hear the old man's heavy breathing in the stillness.

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Biche sat inert until Soardi had all but reached the door, then with a sudden sweep of the hand he sent the lamp crashing to the floor. It went out and a sickly smell of parafine filled the room.

"Get him, Moissiki," ordered Biche, and the Kanaka threw himself forward—on to the point of the kris Soardi had drawn from his belt.

The Kanaka fell to the ground, his throat ripped wide open.

"Well done, Moissiki," came Biche's voice. "He was a young fiend. You were slow the first time—"

"Oh!" he suddenly screamed as a cold hand out of the darkness gripped his throat. "Let me go—let go. Oh, oh, oh——"

Soardi wiped the dripping blade on the dead man's coat and carefully hid it again in the folds of his belt. His mind was working smoothly and clearly. He felt neither pity nor remorse. He had killed two men—both had been evil, dangerous beasts. They would have slain him had the opportunity been granted them.

He groped his way to the door and peered up and down the street. It was deserted and absolutely still. A single gas-jet at the corner flickered, throwing an uncertain light on the peeling front of a shuttered baker's-shop. In the distance the prison clock dolefully chimed ten, shattering the silence.

"Only an hour left," murmured Soardi. He pulled the door shut and, keeping to the shadows, hurried toward the water-front.

HE FOUND the Belle Étoile Cafe without much trouble. It stood surrounded by mean houses, a little out of the town, a drab, dirty place frequented by stevedores and sailors, whites and breeds and Kanakas, pellmell in the one suffocating room which reeked of stale tobacco and staler gin.

The owner, Madame Vautrin, a woman without age, wrinkled, thin, shrill, always occupied the cashier's seat and supervised her two sons, who served the food, and the half-score women who provided the customers with drinks.

With the smell of hot, spilt blood in his nostrils Soardi walked boldly into the noisy room and found a seat in a corner behind a table occupied by some shouting, drunken Lifou boys. He waited patiently and stolidly even when he saw Madame Vautrin whisper with one of her sons. She shrugged her thin shoulders, and the man lounged across the room.

"*Eh bien?*" he asked, leaning forward with the palm of his hand resting on the table. "What do you want, Javanese?"

"Beer," ordered Soardi, staring straight at him.

"You're out late, aren't you?"

"Yes," Soardi lied. "I brought a message to the doctor from my master. There is sickness——"

"Oh," Vautrin looked away indifferently. "You said one beer—where's your money?"

Soardi paid and sat back, his breath coming in sharp gasps. He was excited now for the first time since Talukdar had told him of the sale of Nji Santi. His ice-cold hands were clenched beneath the table until the nails dug deep into his flesh. He would see Santi again soon, very soon now.

A slip of a girl, an octoroon, with the eyes of a mediæval saint and a cruel, hard mouth, brought him his drink. As he gave her a couple of coppers he said without moving his lips—

"Is Nji Santi here?"

The girl looked at him quickly and understood.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Tell her Soardi has come," he murmured as he raised the glass.

The girl laughed shrilly.

"Another drink? That's the way, Javanese. Empty your glass. I'll have it filled."

She glided away, waving her hand to a red-faced, braying ruffian whose arms were all blue with tattoo marks.

Patient, self-composed and seemingly quite indifferent to his surroundings, Soardi watched Madame Vautrin again in confabulation with her son. Again she shrugged her shoulders, but it seemed to Soardi that he was being watched by twenty pairs of prying eyes.

Soon the door at the back of the room swung open and Nji Santi appeared bearing a tray. Behind her came the octoroon. Not by the slightest sign did Soardi reveal his anxiety, but the whole dirty place vanished—Santi, wide-eyed and trembling stood before him.

"Nji," he murmured. "I have come for you."

"That's the way," laughed the octoroon to cover his voice. "You're learning.

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Quick," she added beneath her breath. "Smile at her—smile!"

"Get out the back door at once," urged Soardi, showing all his teeth as he grinned. "I shall take you away."

"I can not get out," choked Santi. "The door is guarded. I am never alone."

"Little flower," Soardi leaned forward and touched her hand. "Have courage. It must be now——"

"Hey, there!" Vautrin's voice suddenly broke in. "Enough of that. Pay up and get out, Javanese. We don't need you here.

"You," he went on addressing the octoroom, "take that girl back to the kitchen. Who told you to let her come out yet? Go on—jump!"

They stood quite still until he reached the table. He was a stocky, thick-set man, with a bullet head on a tremendous neck.

"Hurry," he added and pushed Santi by the shoulder. "Get back there, both of you; and you, Javanese, get out of here."

How could he have foreseen that the stone-visaged Soardi had gone fighting crazy? How could he guess that this commonplace Javanese coolie with the jaunty batik head-cloth would at that moment have fought single-handed against the whole of embattled creation and died happily in his tracks, all for the sake of a frightened, haggard little yellow woman?

He made his initial mistake when he pushed Santi none too gently toward the door. She stood huddled and shaken near the table occupied by the riotous Lifou boys. Then Vautrin made his second mistake. He leaned forward and seized Soardi's arm.

"Now then," he said viciously; "you're too slow. Come on!"

He gave a jerk and the sleeve gave way, ripping noisily from the shoulder to the wrist.

At the sound one of the Lifou boys turned around, caught sight of Santi and leered at her, stretching out a great paw of a hand.

"*Gentille,*" he gulped. "Lifou boy like plenty much."

Soardi went mad. His yell rang clear as a bugle-call above the laughter and the clatter of dishes as he sprang past Vautrin and brought a heavy glass water-jug crashing down on the boy's head. In the lull that followed he caught up Santi and ran headlong for the door.

Vautrin, bellowing like a bull, followed, but the octoroon who had befriended Nji Santi barred his way.

"*Sale brute,*" she muttered between clenched teeth, "you won't stop them," and flung herself at his knees.

They both rolled on to the floor in a welter of splintering chairs and crashing tables.

Soardi reached the door where Madame Vautrin tried to stop him. She screamed in his face, screamed and clawed, but he ducked, whirled, fended her off with his one free hand and was away, racing down the dark road before the customers of the *Belle Étoile* fully realized what had happened.

When Vautrin scrambled at last to his feet, the octoroon lay very still on the ground amid the wreckage. Her head was twisted back and her neck was broken.

Out of the town, past the last straggling huts went the fugitives until they hauled themselves up the long incline and paused for breath on the ridge overlooking Nouméa.

"There is little hope for us," said Soardi, "but at the end we shall be together."

"*Aiel*" replied Santi sinking to her knees. "Together."

He recovered the rifle from beneath the thicket, and they fled through the velvety tropical night, going northwards, climbing up among the hills to avoid the plantations dotted along the coast.

Behind them swelled the roar of the manhunt, for the police had swarmed into the *Belle Étoile* when the racket was at its height and there had not been a dissenting voice when Vautrin blamed the mad Javanese for the octoroon's death.

A description of the fugitives was sent broadcast to every *gendarme* in New Caledonia and when Biche's body was discovered and Talukdar reported Soardi's escape a reward was offered for their capture. Fifteen hundred francs—men stared suspiciously at every chance-met Javanese, but Soardi and his mate had vanished into the hills.

FOR days they lurked in the thick undergrowth near the source of the Yati River. They went hungry and weary, eating wild taros and bananas, never daring light a fire, avoiding even the Kanakas who passed their way. They were discovered at last by a surveyor from the Yati mines and they ducked and fled again, going ever higher into the wild uplands, but

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the police took up the trail and day by day the net closed in about them.

"I can not go on," whispered Santi one afternoon when far away beneath them they spied a policeman toiling along the track.

Soardi gently patted her hand. She was worn and thin and for two days had been racked by fever.

"We are near the end," he answered quietly. "But one debt we still have to discharge. Talukdar who caused all this should suffer as we are suffering. We shall go back to Dombari. Then we can die, if it is so decreed."

So they went down toward the coast, creeping along the bed of a dried-up mountain-stream, crawling by moonlight past native villages, sleeping exhausted in the noontide heat, until ultimately they reached the rocky slopes overlooking Dombari and the ocean, boundless and still.

"Stay here," said Soardi. "Behind these rocks you are safe. I shall go down and settle with Talukdar. Keep this," he placed his kris in her hands. "Use it if you are found while I am away; I shall understand."

"No," answered Santi. "Where you go I shall follow. Our time grows short. There is no escape from this island prison, and I shall stay by your side until—the end."

"It is an order," smiled Soardi. "Let us wait until dark."

When the lights of Dombari glowed in the dusk, they went down into the valley, always keeping under cover, always on the alert. Like shadows they flitted across the main road and dropped flat on the ground when a Kanaka woman came shuffling by, singing lustily to ward off evil spirits.

"First, we shall go to the grove," whispered Soardi. "We might get news there if the place is still used."

"I follow," came Santi's reply.

They passed close to Talukdar's bungalow, so close that they heard his bellow and the rumble of some other man's voice.

Wraiths, they went soundlessly through the garden beneath the rustling palm-trees and at last halted just outside the circle of light cast by the fire about which squatted a dozen men of their own race.

"Be still," breathed Soardi. "Who knows who may be watching."

He raised his voice to a whisper.

"Vatuji, do you hear? It is Soardi."

Not a man by the fire betrayed by a single motion that he had heard the voice, but the boy with the thin black mustache answered:

"Keep clear of the light. There is a watcher just across the stream."

He yawned, spat, and drew a pack of cards from his breast pocket.

"We play?" he asked his companions.

The game began and between counts and exclamations, never turning his head, he talked to Soardi.

"The spy over yonder is a Kanaka—a fool with sharp eyes and little sense. Who forecasts a six on the next turn? He watches thus every night and prays to his gods to protect him from the demons of the dark—Now hear carefully since you, who should have stayed away, have come back—Talukdar has been possessed by the ghost of old Kanidja. Of that there can be no doubt. He walks in terror— He is sleepless and cruel. He has not long to live for the drink kills men more speedily than ghosts out here. He sweats and trembles when he sees one of us. Only black boys are about him now—and the *gendarme*, expecting your return, sits with him. The last card is mine. I win three francs. Is Nji Santi with you?"

"Yes," came the reply, little more than a sigh above the crackling of the fire.

"That is good. A blessing on your house."

"But the roads are blocked behind us and Santi has the fever. She must rest, and rest means death. There is the matter of the reward which I saw on a notice posted to a tree——"

"I know," the boy by the fire shuffled the cards with deliberation. "I know. Even among our own kind this breeds danger. But why did you come back?"

"It is as I said. Santi can go no further and on every track, in every village they watch for us. I thought Talukdar might well make the journey across the last bridge with us—so we returned."

"That is proper and correct," agreed Vatuji. "Proper and correct."

"The Kanaka has gone," suddenly broke in a man at the far end of the group. "I heard the big-footed fool stumble and curse."

"Listen, then," Vatuji said sharply. "You must go, and forget Talukdar. He is paid full measure already.

"There is one little chance. Can you handle a sail?"

"Yes," answered Soardi.

"Good. At the mouth of the river you will find a boat anchored by the hut of the

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Kanaka who collects the mails. It belongs to my master, Ferrau, who was to sail tomorrow for Tanna where he has a cotton-plantation. There are a few provisions on board. You may have trouble with that Kanaka. Go at once. You know the way. Go, and may the Merciful One keep you."

Two miles to crawl to safety! They reached the *gendarme's* stables, they passed the mission church, they crept ever closer to the river. On hands and knees they skirted the edge of Talukdar's vegetable-garden. Beyond lay the river.

And all at once the night became full of shouting men and flaring torches. From every homestead men were running out bearing guns or clubs or spears, anything and everything, for was there not a reward of fifteen hundred francs to be gained?

Soardi and his wife, rigid and still, watched the circle of dancing lights sway, scatter, advance, ever coming nearer and nearer.

"Now," whispered Soardi, "we are very near the end."

"*Aiel*" Santi replied. "But death strikes only once—separation is worse than twenty deaths."

"These Kanakas go shouting more in fear of the dark than in hopes of frightening us," mused Soardi after a pause.

The lights spread out fan-wise, pressing in toward them, but the majority of the hunters were groping through the fields and only a few straggling torches smoked and glared along the river-bank.

"They are behind us now," Soardi went on reflectively. "We might slip through——"

From afar they heard a fresh clamor—the coolies by their fire in the grove had been found.

"Now!" said Soardi.

They moved onward across an open field, through a hedge and dropped into a ditch. The last of the torches were passing by to left and right. They clambered from the shelter of the ditch and stole on until they reached the track by the river.

"Run!" ordered Soardi.

"Oh," sobbed Santi. "I can not, I am weary—tired." She stumbled against a projecting root and fell to the ground. The kris which she had been carrying clattered on the stones of the path.

"There, there, there!" came a shout not fifty yards away. "*Les voilà!*"

"Talukdar," whispered Soardi bending down to help Santi to her feet. There was a happy lilt in his voice, a thrill of pleasure.

A massive form tore through the darkness and came rushing toward them.

"Rest, little one," Soardi said gently. "The others are far behind. There may be a dawn for us tomorrow."

Having gained the path Talukdar advanced more cautiously, swinging a lantern in his left hand, while in the other he carried a heavy machete which he whirled about his head—for iron according to age-old beliefs wards off malignant ghosts. He caught sight of his escaped coolie and he laughed aloud at the sight.

"Fifteen hundred francs for your carcass! Thou hast fallen into evil ways to be hunted and tracked. Murderer——"

Soardi's soul laughed within him. One clean thrust, one ripping upward stroke and Kanidja would be repaid. He must be quick. He poised on his toes ready to strike and as Talukdar feinted he lunged at the vacant air for his foot twisted on a stone and he fell headlong to the ground.

Talukdar pinned him down.

"Just so I shall hold you until the others come. Like a worm, like some crawling thing to be crushed beneath my heel. And where is charming Santi that she may see you die?"

"Here," came a small voice behind him.

Before he could twist around she sank the blade of the kris into his back. Once, twice she stabbed, and again. The laughter died in his throat, the lantern fell from his hand, he tried to claw at his back, and Santi, little Nji Santi, thrust him headlong into the river. The water stifled his last cry.

They found the boat and waded out to it unopposed, for the Kanaka keeper had joined in the hunt.

"See them," cried Soardi.

The torches were coming up the path now, casting red lights on the muddy water.

As they drifted out with the tide a ragged volley burst from the shore and a stray bullet whined by overhead. The darkness swallowed them; the torches fluttering on the waterside died away.

North they went with the stars to guide them and the trade wind sang of Java.

"We shall go home," laughed Soardi, and Nji Santi answered—

"If the gods are kind—but it is very far."

"True," he agreed, "but together we can reach to the stars."

They were still very young.

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Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, L. S. Chester rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Cleveland, Ohio.

Were my life as rich in adventure and knowledge of the far places as that of some of the comrades whose wanderings I have followed through the pages of this magazine, I should have something to tell you. As it is, I am afraid you will find me rather humdrum.

As to adventures, in the broader sense of the word, I have had none. My life, it seems to me, has flowed along rather tame and uninteresting lines. However, like every one else, I have had a few experiences.

At nineteen, after serving as hotel clerk, steamboat clerk, and in various other temporary occupations, I became a railroad brakeman. At first, puffed up with a youthful sense of authority, I tried to make life miserable for the hoboes. I unloaded them promiscuously and importantly, without regard for age, creed or color, along the right-of-way. Later I came to view them as human beings and violated some very rigid rules laid down by the company. Often I have ensconced some grimy wanderer in a straw-littered empty, climbed through the end door after the train was in motion, divided tobacco with him, and listened to tales of strange happenings in some remote corner of the world whither his restlessness had lured him.

In this way I have met every type of hobo on the face of the earth, I think, from the tyro, young and smooth of cheek, obeying his first restive impulse, to the grizzled veteran on the wind-up of a life-long pilgrimage. All have their own views on mundane and celestial schemes; many have acquired quaint and startling philosophies; all are human, and all are interesting, once you come to know them. I have been in some serious wrecks; helped to drag dead and dying from others.

Leaving the railroad, I became a traveling salesman for one of the larger meat-packing concerns, covering a portion of the South, including the feud districts of Kentucky, and parts of Tennessee and Virginia. I have ridden horseback, day after day, through those feud-famed mountains to remote

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towns and encountered only kindness and hospitality.

My next move was to the Southwest, where I acted as representative for a flour-milling concern, covering western Texas and small portions of Oklahoma and Arizona. In this capacity I visited towns fifty and sixty miles from a railroad and came to know something of the country. I have met and talked with cowboys, sheepherders, sheriffs and Mexicans; have seen something of modern ranch life, and heard a great deal that isn't so modern from old-timers who had grown up with the country and never ceased to mourn the passing of the "Good Old Wild-and-Woolly Days." Also have witnessed rodeos in which some excellent talent participated.

During the past few years I have been engaged in the selling of automobiles, save for several months during the war when I spent eleven hours a day, six days a week, and sometimes seven, making gas shells for Uncle Sam.

And that is about all, I guess, except that I live in a city and yearn for the wild; have a gun and seldom go hunting; love dogs and do not own one. Aversions: The young man with open galoshes and the automobile driver who tries to see how close he can come to my bus without wrecking it. Ambition: To live in the woods and write of life, as I see it, in a worth-while manner.—LELAND S. CHESTER.

SOMETHING from William Wells of our writers' brigade. (Note that William Wells, William H. Wells and G. A. Wells are all members of our writers' brigade.)

Redmond, Oregon.

I am going to butt into the argument of fact versus fiction by saying that you are right in keeping *Adventure* a fiction magazine and more than right in saying that it is hard to tell what are facts. As an example of this I am going to criticize a statement of Mr. Frank H. Huston on page 145 of the August 10th issue. Speaking of the Cheyenne Indians and their dependence on the buffalo Mr. Huston says, "absolutely nothing of the carcass being wasted," he evidently believing the common but altogether erroneous idea that the Western Indians, or perhaps I should say the horse Indians of the plains, were not wasteful of game.

IT IS well known that the Sioux, Arapahoe and Cheyenne Indians had so slaughtered the buffalo that the diminution was serious and noticeable before 1840. This is amply testified to by the reports of Army officers and the records of the trading companies.

Perhaps the most comprehensive of these reports is that of Captain John C. Frémont to the secretary of war, dated March first, 1843, at which time no one could claim that white hunters were slaughtering the buffalo to any great extent. The report is too long to quote here, but is easily accessible.

Frémont says that the Indians "slaughter them (the buffalo) with a thoughtless and abominable extravagance," that the animals were becoming so scarce on the range of the three tribes above mentioned that they were greatly alarmed by the scarcity of the food supply and were debating whether to raid the white settlements or try to whip the Crows, in whose territory buffalo were still very plentiful, and more to the same effect.

ANY one that has been much with the Western Indians knows that when game was plentiful they slaughtered it by wholesale, saving only a small part of the meat, not only buffalo, but deer, elk and antelope also.

It is of course true that after the railroads struck the plains the white skin-hunters finished the buffalo quickly, but they only completed what the Indians had begun long before.

My own idea is that until the plains Indians had horses, which was most likely the middle or latter part of the sixteenth century, they could not make any inroads on the buffalo, but once they were well mounted the finish of the buffalo began.—WM. WELLS.

FOR years I've longed for a day when the people of the United States might have a chance to elect as President a man of a certain kind. First, that man would be honest. Not just honest in the sense that he would not steal money. Not just honest in that he would keep always within the letter of the law. But so honest that no issue in life could arise that would not be mercilessly analyzed to find its right and its wrong. So honest that, when he found the right, nothing in the world could swerve him from it in even the smallest detail, even if following the right meant his own destruction. So honest that all the pressure of party and wealth and abuse and persecution could not shift him one hair's breadth from the course he had set. Very few men are that honest, and the politicians who pick our presidential candidates do not choose from those few if there is any possible way of avoiding it. That kind of man does not make the kind of candidate and President they can use for their own purposes.

THE man I have longed for would not only believe in democracy but he would understand it. He would do more. He would believe in it all the time. He would cling to it relentlessly and follow it out to its logical conclusions in spite of hell and high water. Understanding democracy, he would know that his duty was to the whole people, not to any party, class or other part of them. Understanding democracy, he would know that he must hold himself in trust for the people, that the country's affairs were the people's affairs, that if in handling them he allowed anything or anybody in the world to influence him against the will and interest of the majority of the people, he would be guilty of treason, however little that word is now applied to such perversions of duty.

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He would be fearless. No threat, no punishment, no agony could make him swerve from his path of utter, absolute, stark honesty.

There are not many men like that, and the politicians do not choose from among them if there is any possible way out. The politicians want men who will respond to party needs and demands and to the same pressure to which the parties themselves respond. And the politicians have nearly always been able to get that kind, even if sometimes driven to compromise or even surrender.

THE man I want would be intelligent. Not just brainy, but with understanding. He would then, I think, believe that, with understanding intelligence guiding it, *fearless and absolute honesty can, in a democracy, smash all the forces of evil that can be and will be arrayed against it.* As President the interests, labor as well as capital, would again and again face him with this choice: "Swerve here or we will make you pay this penalty." If he resists them, they will go deeper—if they understand him aright—and face him with this choice: "Swerve here or we will make the people and democracy pay this penalty." The necessity of that choice has again and again worked deadly hurt upon the cause of real democracy in this country.

But the hardened self-seekers who present that choice can be smashed. By honesty, fearlessness and democracy. And by publicity. Let him answer them by turning to the people and saying: "I am confronted with this choice. If I choose the right, they will do you and me this injury. I am going to choose the right. The rest is in *your* hands. I play my part. Play yours. *You* hold a power greater than theirs, however great theirs may be."

Does it sound foolish? Believe me, there was never anything less foolish. Would the American people respond to a man like that? Give them a man they *know* they can trust and they will back him against hell itself. They will trample his enemies under their feet, for they know that his enemies are their enemies.

MANY years I have longed for a man like that as President of the United States. A forlorn hope, a vain wish, a dream. The politicians stand between. Such a man would spell their downfall, they are the ones who choose the few candidates for President and tell us to vote for one of these or go without, and they are far too keen to commit political and financial suicide. Such a man would mean the smashing of party power, and party power is the basis of all their profit. And of the profit of those who control the politicians.

But today I received from a friend an ordinary sheet of white letter paper, either a carbon copy of typewriting or multigraphed from typewriting. I do not know who sent it to my friend—he merely asked what I thought of it. There was no letterhead, no names of the usual committee, no names of anybody. Just a sheet of paper that some citizen or citizens, unknown to me, had passed on to other citizens, in a truly democratic way, asking those other citizens to endorse it if they believed it right to endorse it and then pass it on to still other citizens. Here is what was on the paper:

William Allen White's defense of free speech in the *Emporia Gazette* is a noble piece of writing. More than that, it is a proclamation of the American spirit, of the whole Democratic idea, that stamps White a prophet of the ideals on which our country was founded.

For twenty years White has preached the kind of Americanism we want to rediscover. From his editorial chair in a little Kansas town he has wielded a vast influence. Those who are closest to him love him best, but he has a million friends throughout all the States.

White is a natural leader. He was one of the makers of the Progressive Party, and no one understood better than he its purpose and meaning. He has been in politics all his life, not as a politician but as a citizen. White is one of our profoundest students of politics; and he is saturated with Americanism.

Where is there a bigger man with courage, honesty, vision, and a sense of what these United States stand for, to lead us back into the old ways, adapting them to the new time?

White is a literary man. Well, the American people have elected one literary man President—Theodore Roosevelt. Have they ever regretted it?

White is not "available"—so the politicians will say. He comes from a "safe" State. But what do we, citizens, care for availability in the politician's sense?

Will you join the William Allen White-for-President Club? There are no dues, no buttons, no meetings. Just give your assent, talk it, and pass this on to not less than three of your friends.

My friend asked what I think of it. I have never met William Allen White, have no acquaintance or connection of any kind with him. But I have a pretty good idea

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of what he is and what he stands for. If I am ever given a chance to vote for him as President of the United States I think I'll be willing to crawl to the polls on my hands and knees if I can get there in no other way. I believe what the sheet of paper says, all of it. William Allen White is the kind of man I've been longing for.

The politicians say he is not "available"? That is only a recommendation for him. I do not want a candidate who is "available" for the politicians. God knows I don't.

IT DOESN'T make any difference to me on what party ticket his name might appear. One party is as rotten as the others, which is very rotten indeed. I'd rather see his name on the ticket of a brand-new party, a party devoted to the people first and itself afterward. But if the Republican party can be black-jacked into putting his name on their ticket I'll very cheerfully vote that ticket. Incidentally, unless some stroke from heaven makes the Republican party put some such name as his on their ticket, I have an idea it will be the last ticket the Republican party ever puts up. I voted for it the last time solely because I believed its administration would be so reactionary and so controlled by the politicians that it would be the straw to break the camel's back and make Americans in their disgust turn, not to radicalism, but to the kind of progressivism that spells real democracy. That administration is proving just as reactionary and controlled as I expected and I'm hoping the expected result also will come to pass.

WHAT right have I, in this magazine, to state my preference for President? An American's right.

For years I've talked democracy to you in this magazine and your response has always justified my continuing to do so. I know how many of you are, like myself, aching for real democracy and better citizenship in America. A man arises who, I believe, has the qualities of the man I've dreamed of as best fitted to lead us to what we want. Therefore I tell you. That is all. Each of you will use his own judgment. I am not arguing. Merely telling.

But I do argue for one thing. If any party, new or old, can be forced to put up a man who is not a machine candidate, vote for that man if other things are anywhere nearly equal and unless there is a master reason for not doing so. Whatever you do, don't vote for party as party. Your duty is to vote for a man and for the principles you believe you can get into force through that man, not for a party. Party loyalty can not stand before loyalty to the country. Party loyalty is meaningless and foolish in itself, and the man who has voted either the Democratic or Republican ticket year after year has cause to feel shame for himself as an American citizen. With qualification for their youth and size and for comparative consistency and definiteness of aim, the same holds good for all the other parties.

Our party system has become one of our greatest evils. Do what you can to break down its present exaggerated hold. The people must have a more direct voice in the original choice of candidates instead of being allowed merely to choose among half a dozen men carefully picked out by political parties for their own selfish ends. Don't be loyal to what is most disloyal to you.

SOMETHING more about the Lost Tribes of Israel, this time from a Jewish comrade and taking issue with the theories previously advanced:

Memphis, Tennessee.

In the August 10 number there appeared a letter from one "E. B. B." of Colorado Springs, Col., relative to the "Lost Ten Tribes of Israel."

I do not remember what theory Talbot Mundy advanced regarding the Ten Tribes, but I know that I would be inclined to give any statements by Mundy on the peoples of the East considerable credence and would not brand it as being "all wrong" without very careful study of the question, for Mr. Mundy certainly knows whereof he writes. I know it.

The fate of "The Ten Lost Tribes" seems to have caused historians and ethnologists considerable loss of sleep from time to time, and I do not believe there is a race, tribe nor bunch large enough to constitute a quorum, and whose origin is not definitely fixed, who have not, with much argument and theory mostly of the wildest kind and thoroughly vague, been declared to be descendants of the Lost Ten.

It would seem as if the Jews have not had burdens heaped upon them sufficiently, historically and otherwise, but must bear the burden of being the ancestors of every rag-tag, bobtail Tom, Dick and Harry of a race or people whose origin is shrouded in the fog of the mysterious past. Many of these peoples without doubt were just where they are today when the Tribes became "lost."

The practise seems to have been "when in doubt lay it to the 'Lost Ten'; they are gone anyway and can not protest."

Now to get down to cases, Lord Kinsborough and "E. B. B." and many others to the contrary notwithstanding:

In about the year 700 B. C., one Sargon—known

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as Sargon II, and by means that were devious and ways that were dark king of the Assyrian Empire—became tired of the continuous bickerings and the general disturbing of the peace by this part of Judea and, probably having a "hang over" and being in a bad humor generally, looked around for some one to take it out on, took nine and the most part of the tenth tribe (for a part of the Tribe of Levi was not deported, but remained with the other two) and sent the whole mess over into Media or, to be a little more exact, into Parthia and told them to stay put, neglecting to furnish them with return transportation.

They remained right there too, he (Sargon) giving them leave to raise all the different kinds of —— they wished so long as they did not play the harp and cymbals after ten at night and cause complaints from the neighbors.

These tribes remained right where they were put, and are about the only part of the Jewish race that *have not* wandered all over the face of the world.

THE inhospitable section to which they were sent is Afghanistan, and the descendants of the Ten Tribes are there unto this day, for I have seen them and so have many others. Many still remain true to the Jewish faith, but quite a few of them have adopted Mohammedanism, and these today, when mentioned in polite society, are called "Pathans" and many other things when speaking after the manner of men.

I might mention, in passing, that they make darn good soldiers and are without doubt the most accomplished horse-thieves that I have ever known—and that is going some.

Those who retain the old faith wear black caps, the others, 'most anything that comes handy, generally turbans of sorts.

NOW the American Indian, being of the Mongoloid division of the human race, was probably right here at the time of the deportation of the Ten, and nothing but the wildest flights of theory could ascribe to them Semitic origin. The Tribes of Judah, Benjamin and the small part of the Tribe of Levi, have been the wanderers. The Tribe of Benjamin, of which I am a proud but at the same time a humble member, migrated mostly along the Barbary States into Spain. There were also many of the neighboring people of Semitic origin who were not Jews, but, on the decline and fall of the worship of Moloch and Baal, became converts to Judaism. Most of those peoples did not belong to any of the tribes of Israel and were never in Palestine. A great many of these converts followed the Benjamites into Spain, and others of them went into upper Egypt and Abyssinia.

REGARDING the horse in America—that is, the horse as we know it today—E. B. B. is correct. Cortez brought the horse along with the smallpox and a warped idea concerning the future salvation of the Indians. However, research has brought to the light of the 'ologist, the remains of a prehistoric horse, probably of the Miocene or early Pleistocene periods. This animal was considerably smaller than the horse of today and had three or five toes (probably) on each foot. Anyway they had passed away long before the arrival of Señor Cortez, and neither memory nor the legend of them seems to have been kept active in the minds of the Indians. The horses of Cortez were looked upon as wonderful and fearful beasts.

Now I have not written any of this for the purpose of starting an argument or anything, but, being a Jew of the Tribe of Benjamin, I have naturally been much interested in mine own people, and for close on to fifty years have made a close study of this subject, having been fortunate in gaining information which is not easily accessible to many people—particularly non-Jews.—R. MONTEFIORE MORDECAI.

READING the following may make your mouth water. I'm quite willing to believe that wild ones will, knowing that tame ones do. And my doubts are gone as to what the grapes would do. So far as I personally was concerned neither of the above points mattered at all—it was a good story, and these details didn't worry me. But I long since learned the bitter lesson that any time any doubtful or even halfway doubtful point arises in a story some readers are going to be worried by it and write in to us. So I raised these two questions to Mr. Cunningham; he took the same view of the situation and has answered in advance any possible critics among readers of his story in this issue:

San Francisco, California.

Will wild animals touch fermented stuff?

The books on bird-diet say very little and nothing entirely germane to the question. It runs in my mind that somewhere, in past reading of natural history, I've seen the point covered affirmatively; but I can't lay finger on the reference at the present moment. However, only a few days ago I noted a newspaper item concerning the presence of *bees* about mash from a wrecked bootleg still. According to the reporter, the bees deserted the flowers of the locality to flock about the mash. It was remarked, half-seriously, that the honey made would probably be mildly intoxicating.

ALSO, a dozen times or more "since prohibition" I've read accounts of pigs and chickens growing hilarious from feeding on the residue from stills; several times such stills have been discovered through the peculiar antics of hogs and chickens in the neighborhood. I have *seen* chickens, parrots and dogs "under the influence." There's a parrot here, belonging to an acquaintance of a friend of mine, which, when given a whisky-glassful of moonshine last Christmas, drank it to the final drop and was ludicrously intoxicated. It was the first time the parrot had ever tasted liquor, so far as any one knew.

When I served on the cruiser *New Orleans* the sailmaker had an Airedale terrier which usually went ashore with the liberty-party. One night in 1916, when several of us were in a San Diego bar, some bright mind suggested "trying the beer on the dog," remarking that it wasn't fit for said dog to drink. Rags disproved the statement, for he lapped up a

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quart and during the evening drank more; got royally lit-up, as a matter of record. The sail-maker, who had owned him from puppyhood, said it was Rags' first fall from temperance. Of course, one usually draws a line between *wild* animals and animals and birds in domestication or even captivity, on the ground that the appetites of the latter are more or less perverted. But in Farmers' Bulletin 630—a report of the Biological Survey covering crop-destroying propensities of wild birds—I find the following:

"Much has been written about the delicate discrimination of birds for choice fruit and their selection of only the finest and choicest varieties. *This is contrary to observed facts.* Birds, unlike human beings, seem to prefer fruit that, like the mulberry, is sweetly insipid, or that, like the choke-cherry or holly, has some *astringent or bitter quality.* The so-called 'black alder', a species of holly, has bright scarlet berries tasting as bitter as quinin, that ripen late in October and remain on the bushes through November. Though 'frost grapes,' the fruit of the Virginia creeper, and several species of dogwood are abundant at the same time, the birds have been found to eat the berries of the holly to a considerable extent."

CARRYING the matter a bit further, it seems to me logical to assume that a bird which relishes holly berries "as bitter as quinin" wouldn't find fermented grapes unpalatable, particularly as chickens, which have a diet much the same as that of wild birds, will eat them eagerly.

Also, in Tasmania and Australia is a "fruit pigeon" (of the *Carphophagidæ*). The principal item of diet of these birds is, as suggested by the name, fruit. Using this fact as premise, it seems to me logical that, since they eat sound fruit, they might conceivably eat rotten fruit; and, since fermented fruit is only a kind of rotten fruit, that they would eat fermented fruit.

I'm afraid I can offer no more specific authority on this question than that given above, which seems to leave the point to be settled by individual opinion. Trying to adopt the viewpoint of the unbiased outsider, I think I'd regard it as satisfactory, but if you still consider it a doubtful point, please notify me and I'll cheerfully revise this portion of the manuscript to eliminate the ". . . two tiny brown birds he watched. . . ." The bees and insects I think I've given, above, creditable passports. And for the other question:

AND would these grapes have developed alcohol in these circumstances? Particularly when not far enough along to fall from bunch?

What I intended to convey was that the grapes which fermented had, through the accidental breaking down of the vines and trampling in the "rocky basin" of the fruit under the feet of "some great beast," undergone the three elementary processes of the simplest method of wine-making (as practised today in Spain): Gathering, pressing and violent fermentation through heat of the sun.

The grapes *would* "press themselves in the bunch" if the variety was soft enough to ripen thoroughly and the sun's heat sufficient to accomplish fermentation. The juice would drip and, if caught in a vat, ferment.

But, though I had authority for this, I didn't want to strain the probabilities and send some Doubting Thomas encyclopedia-ward to the hurt of his interest in the yarn. Briefly, the process was this: Accidentally the grapes were scattered over the surface of the rocky basin which was, in one, pressing floor and fermentation vat. The actual wine was produced by juice running into hollows in the floor of the basin, which were semi-sealed by vines and leaves over the top. So the grapes atop were broken and souring, only; half-fermented. As a direct reply to the question, decidedly, yes; grapes under the conditions stated would develop alcohol.

In support of my assertion that grapes *unpressed* will yield their juice, I quote from McMullen's "Handbook of Wines" page 23:

"There is one species of wine made without beating, or pressing, or treading; this is what they call in Spain *'lagrima.'* The grapes, melting with ripeness, are suspended in bunches and the wine is the produce of the droppings. This can only be effected with the *muscatel* grapes of the warm South. In this way the richest Malaga is made. . . ."—EUGENE CUNNINGHAM.

BE MARKING down your favorite stories for our annual vote by readers on the best fiction published in the magazine during the year. Send us at the end of the year a sheet of paper on which you have written, in order of preference, the titles of the ten stories that you consider the best in the issues for 1922. If you wish, you may add ten more for honorable mention. Be marking down your favorites as you go along.

MORE about Comanche, the horse of the last Custer battle, from a Missouri comrade:

Kansas City, Missouri.

Some months ago *Adventure* carried an article regarding Comanche, the only survivor of the famous battle of the Little Big Horn where Custer made his valiant last stand.

MY FRIEND "Dick" Hastings, of Kansas City, told me that the horse was in the Dyche Museum at Lawrence, Kansas. Dick was right; the horse is there, and in the belief that you would be interested in getting some first-hand information I will quote from the statement of Ezra B. Fuller, of Lawrence, who was transferred from the Eighth Cavalry to the Seventh immediately after the fight:

Comanche was a Government-owned horse assigned to Capt. Miles W. Keogh, Troop "I," Seventh Cav., and was ridden by him and not by Custer. The horse was found four days after the battle grazing near the battlefield. He was suffering from seven (not six) flesh wounds and was led (not carried) into camp.

General Sturgis issued a regimental order that the horse was never to be ridden again and that he should appear in mourning on all occasions of parade by the Seventh Regiment.

In 1888 he marched overland from Fort Meade to Fort Riley, Kansas, where he died in 1892 or 1893. He was never returned to either Fort Meade or Fort Lincoln after being sent to Riley.

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After his death a movement was started to have the officers of the regiment pay for the expense of having the remains mounted and placed in the museum as property of the regiment, but the necessary funds could not or would not be secured. It is my understanding that the State of Kansas now owns the specimen.

COMANCHE is a light bay all over except a white near hind foot. As he stands in the museum today he might well be accepted as an ideal type of charger. He was certainly a fine animal and one well qualified to represent the spirit of that tragedy.

Another point which, while not relevant to the subject, may be well taken here, is that the museum also displays a photograph of Custer which was taken just three weeks before the battle.

This photo dispels the popular idea that Custer wore long hair at the time of his death. The picture was printed in a New York paper (the *Times*, I think) when he left there for Washington on his way West. There is no doubt of its authenticity. — H. R. LAUDERMILK.

AS TO the Anti-Weapon Law—the national Sullivan Law—before Congress. It nearly passed, and its friends are waiting for a chance to shove it through.

And please note this. I'm told that the intention is not to prohibit pistols and revolvers alone but *all firearms*. The proposed law reads "all weapons that may be concealed on the person." Its promoters, while trying to get the bill through, say that it covers only pistols and revolvers, but once the bill becomes law, it is asserted, the intent is to apply the wording of the law literally. And if it *is* applied literally, shotguns and rifles become illegal, for they "may be concealed on the person" of a man wearing an overcoat.

If that is true—and it *can* be true—the result of that law will be to disarm the American people. Disarm them entirely. Only the troops of the States and the national Government can bear arms; the bulk of the people become absolutely helpless against a misuse of the power of those troops, and that fact becomes a constant temptation to politicians and the interests controlling them. On the other hand, since only troops can bear arms and the number of troops can be reduced without limit, the bulk of the people can be left helpless not only to the will of criminals but to the will of any group of revolutionaries (who most certainly *will have* arms, law or no law) who wish to turn our country upside down.

AND criminals, who, as *facts* prove, always have weapons, become the masters of the population. Police protection? Bosh! And what police protection have the farms and ranches and all who live outside towns? None but their own—the rifles, shotguns and small-arms in the homes of the people.

And even if all human beings suddenly became angels, what about the little matter of protecting life and property from animals? Prohibit bullets and then count the cost in dollars through crops devastated by "varmints" after a few years of multiplication checked only by traps and poison.

ALSO there is this little matter: The Second Amendment of the Constitution of the United States reads as follows:

A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

If this proposed law doesn't infringe that right, what does? Is there no limit to attacks upon our personal liberties? And don't forget that "militia" does not mean just National Guard, but a "citizenry trained to arms"—the people at large.

This matter is not a little one. It is a very big one. Do something now instead of waiting and kicking after it has been slipped over on you. Write your Congressman. Get others to do so. Draw up formal protests and get long lists of signatures. Get protests into your local papers—into every newspaper and magazine you can. Don't let it be slipped over because the public doesn't realize what it really means or even know that it is being considered. Get busy!

Here's a letter making some sound points, but even this opponent of the bill does not realize that it *can* be construed—and enforced—so as to take from us rifles and shotguns as well as small-arms:

New York City.

Re the Sullivan Law, let us beware of theory and reasoning, for they do not always jibe with practise.

TO THE usual arguments, it may be said that the police should guard homes, or that citizens may confine themselves to non-concealable weapons. It may further be said that a nation-wide prohibition would have different results from enforcement of local or State ordinances; New York's weapons come across the river from New Jersey. To keep the nation practised in arms, the rifle is sufficient, or pistol practise may be obtained in the National Guard.

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These arguments seem to take much force from many points advanced against the Sullivan Law. So let us confine ourselves to facts.

I HAVE recently sold two .38 Colts, altered from cap-and-ball; made in 1859. They can still hit a tin pot at 40 yards, 6 out of 6. A Westchester (N. Y.) murder was committed with a revolver sold in 1908; a Brooklyn doctor was recently shot with a revolver sold in 1902. One of the most effective weapons ever made—the Colt's Frontier Model, was first put out in 1873.

In other words, revolvers last (as far as effectiveness is concerned) "forever." Millions are sold each year, of which but 2 or 3 per cent. are worn out, destroyed or seized by the authorities. There is already in the hands of the public a revolver supply sufficient to last the active members (criminals) 200 or more years. What use prohibiting the sale?

Almost every pistol cartridge made is also a rifle cartridge. How stop the sale of ammunition, without stopping also the sale of hunting-ammunition? As to the latter, just try to do it.

AS TO whether pistol-toting causes crime, consider the Boston police strike. Any citizen could get a license to carry a gun, and most of them did; every store was sold almost completely out of every short arm from derringers to game-getters; cartridges, ditto.

Except the business section, Boston was practically unpoliced for weeks.

Here is a modern city of mixed population, filled with gun-*carrying* inhabitants, without any amount of police protection. It is possibly the only example from which we could argue; that is, where conditions approximate those in our own big cities.

Was there a wave of violent crime? Look at the records. I do not recall a single case of highway robbery; in any event, they were very few. Crime occurrence did not go above normal. Those permits were good for one year; did the brand-new police force have increased crime to cope with? The records show they did not.

FINALLY, just how menacing is the revolver in criminal hands? Don't forget that the brass knuckles and dagger are so deadly and so secret that *no authorities* (so far as I know) *will issue a license to carry them!*

Now these points are based on fact; these things happened. There is no opinion to doubt; no reasoning to oppose. No sane man can really believe that black is white.

Spread the news, boys. The people we need to reach do not read the Camp-Fire.—ALFRED W. MILLER.

The above merely furnishes some good arguments against the bill. The important thing is to *use* those and all other sound arguments. Get on the job! Get busy! Wake people up! Get after your Representatives and Senators!

If you are a good enough American to be interested in defeating the attempt to pass a national law prohibiting American citizens from owning or carrying pistols and revolvers—and, by a "joker," possibly shotguns and rifles—here's a way to a practical step.

Field and Stream plans a more sane law on the subject as a substitute for the proposed iniquitous bill and to submit its proposal to all outdoor organizations, the American Legion, etc., for approval and cooperation. Join in. Such an undertaking requires money. It is not fair to make *Field and Stream* bear the whole expense of a fight in the interest of all of us. Do your share if their campaign meets with your approval. Find out about it and join in. Write Hy. S. Watson, Editor, *Field and Stream*, 25 West 45th St., New York City.

Here's a chance to unite our efforts and to do so in a practical manner. Publicity helps a lot, but more than talk is needed. Whatever the lawyers may say about it, all such measures as the Anti-Weapon Bill are infringements of our Constitutional rights and personal liberties. It's a vastly bigger question than just one of firearms. Act!

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map. Help make them grow.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

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When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service (except our assaying and oil services) free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.

1, 2. The Sea. In Two Parts
3, 4. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
5, 6. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
7. Australia and Tasmania
8. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
9. New Guinea
10. Philippine Islands
11. Hawaiian Islands and China
12. Japan
13. Asia, Southern
14—20. Africa. In Seven Parts
21. Turkey and Asia Minor
22, 23. Balkans. In Two Parts
24. Scandinavia
25. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
26, 27. South America. In Two Parts
28. Central America
29, 30. Mexico. In Two Parts
31—37. Canada. In Seven Parts
38. Alaska
39. Baffinland and Greenland
40—44. Western U. S. In Five Parts
45—48. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
49—52. Eastern U. S. In Four Parts
Our Assaying and Oil Services
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Fishing in North America
Mountains and Mountaineering
Old Songs That Men Have Sung
Standing Information
Lost Trails

Malemiuts

DON'T trust 'em!

Question:—"Will you please give me the name or names of people where I can get a malemiut dog, or the breed of dogs used for pulling sledges?

I wish to get a pup and raise it to protect my wife and child."—T. J. JONES, Hilton Village, Va.

Answer, by Mr. Shaw:—Regarding your question *in re* the purchase of a malemiut for use as a house-dog, I *might* reply very briefly to the effect that if any are bred near, or south of, the Canadian line, I am not so informed. In fact, I do not think they are.

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The "A. A." service, however, includes general information as well as advice for the use of all *Adventure* fans. So I shall answer your query in more detail.

My experience with the true malemiut, or Eskimo sledge-dog, is such that I could not recommend the animal for the purpose desired. This, for the following reasons:

It is difficult, if not quite impossible, to acclimate these dogs to great changes of climate, especially to one such as yours, where the average annual temperature is forty degrees. Decided changes of locality, and diet, cause disease—especially distemper and disorders of the stomach.

The malemiut has a very heavy fur next the skin under the long hair. He is perfectly comfortable in the dead of the arctic Winter, asleep on the ice without shelter when the temperature is flirting with the forties and fifties *below*. I had a collie that was mighty uncomfortable during the Summer months at 10,000 feet altitude in the Rockies, and a collie is a thin-coat in comparison with a malemiut.

The true malemiut is really nothing but an arctic wolf that is but partially, or scarcely at all, domesticated. They rarely, if ever, lose their wolfish instincts (fiction tales to the contrary notwithstanding) and I doubt if pups could have their natural propensities trained out of them. I should be afraid to trust any child of mine alone with one at any time, even if the animal had been kept rolling fat.

Some have been known to become attached to their drivers to a certain extent—mainly because they are accustomed to look to them for food; but an experienced driver never trusts them. We always had to tie our dogs to feed them, even when they were not especially ravenous, as they generally are. Eskimos feed them whip in hand. It would be a dangerous and probably fatal operation to try to feed a bunch of hungry sledge-dogs—untied.

This, for the true arctic sledge-dog, which you ask about. The word "malemiut," by the way, is an Alaska term. In Greenland, or along the western shores of Davis Straits and Baffin Bay, these dogs (in all points similar) are called "huskies" or by the Eskimo name. Big animals too, they are. I've known some that weight 125 pounds.

In Alaska, as in all sub-arctic regions, or in the timber, or partially timbered sections, other types or breeds of dogs are used for sledge-work. Perhaps it is these other breeds of which you have heard. If you have seen (or heard) of a true malemiut in the United States, the dog was either in transit, or he didn't live to be very old. Almost any large-framed, strong dog will train easily for sledge-work, if it is of the shaggy-coated type. Sledge-dogs of this sort are often spoken of erroneously as malemiuts, and perhaps it was a dog of this sort you had in mind.

I have not mentioned price as yet.

A Greenland husky cost us around ten to twenty kroners (Danish) *in Greenland!* That is from two and a half to five dollars U. S. currency. But the cost of getting one to Virginia would be out of all proportion to its worth. The nearest point where you can get a dog of this type is on the northern coast of Labrador, such as Domino Run, Battle Harbor, or Nain. But—dogs we obtained there and took to Greenland did not do well, and most of them died.

Personally I think the dog you want is a thoroughbred male Airedale. Having owned them, I can recommend them. They are strictly "one-man" dogs, devoted to their masters, savage to any intruder, and perfectly safe with the owners' family.

Pups may be obtained in almost any city of a dog fancier, at a price of $15 to $25.

Hope I've given you a line on the subject that may help you; and I shall be glad to hear what you do get, or answer any further questions that I am able.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in alternate issues of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

The Philippine Civil Service

REMEMBER, though, that when the islands get their independence the American in Government employ is likely to be out of luck:

Question:—"I take the liberty of writing you to make some inquiries about the Philippine Islands.

I would like to know what are the chances of getting on as a civilian Government employee or with a private concern. Which would you advise if both are possible?

Is there such a thing as getting the Government or others to pay one's expenses to the islands?

I am twenty-seven years old, healthy, active and single. My business experience, covering nine years, includes general office and field work in the structural-steel line, oil-refining and marketing, and several branches of railroad work.

Might add that I was brought up abroad, in North Africa and Spain, so that I know the language pretty well. Have knocked around quite a little since, so the traveling is nothing new.

I surely would appreciate any information you can give me as to how to go about getting placed; also any other pertinent dope."—PAUL D. NATHAN, Los Angeles, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Connor:—The chance of getting employment in civil service is purely by competitive examination. Write the Civil-Service Commission, Federal Building, Los Angeles, Calif., for a schedule of examinations for Philippine Islands. I would advise this method in preference to civilian employment—the reason being that natives fill practically all civilian positions.

If you were to pass successfully a civil-service examination and received an appointment to the islands, your transportation *only* would be furnished you aboard some of the United States Army transports. Your meals would cost you about one dollar per day. The civil service furnishes you with this information also.

In your list of past employment I see only railroad, steel construction and marketing as being useful in the islands. Again there are but two railroads in the islands—one at Iloilo, Panay Island

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P. I., the other at Manila, P. I. The steel-construction work would have to come from a connection with some firm in the islands.

If you happen to be a member of some fraternal organization with a representative in Manila, you might drop a line to that party and have him look out for a position. Otherwise I would not be able to advise you.

Under your reference to pertinent "dope" as concerns the questions asked, I might add that as a study of conditions existing there at present, see Dean Worcester's work on "The Philippine Islands." That would be your best guide to knowledge of the various tribes, customs of each tribe, temperatures, rainfall, etc., etc.

Have I answered your questions to your satisfaction? I hope I have; if not state definitely just what you would desire, and I'm yours to command. Thank you!

Greenstone

WHAT the Maoris would wage war for any time:

Question:—"I am writing you as a representative of *Adventure* for the following information if it is not too remote from the nature of the service you are supposed to render.

I am interested in the New Zealand greenstone—a stone said to rival the diamond in hardness and of other peculiar properties—obtainable only in New Zealand. I would like to know where I might send to obtain some samples of this stone, or if you should know you might have it sent direct, and collect for both transportation and the service rendered. I would like about fifteen cubic centimeters (6 inches) or the equivalent of smaller pieces."—H. G. CROSE, care of Idaho Technical Inst., Pocatello, Idaho.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—You have been correctly informed regarding our greenstone (miscalled jade by some folks). Greenstone is peculiar to New Zealand. I can not send you a piece, for to me it is only available in the polished state as sold in the jeweler's shops, as it is highly prized as ornaments for men and women alike.

A greenstone pendant is the commonest thing to be seen on men's watchguards and chains in New Zealand. And the thousands of Australian tourists who come over here annually always make a point of taking home a greenstone ornament. So hard is it to polish that before the war most of the cutting and polishing were done in Germany. But I notice in recent years that, besides a firm down in Dunedin, there is a firm in Wellington that now does its own cutting and polishing on the premises. Write to Littlejohn & Son, Lambton Quay, Wellington, New Zealand.

Greenstone was the most valued thing in olden Maoriland, before the white man invaded this country, and to this date the families of the Maori chiefs treasure the greenstone weapons of warfare and personal ornaments that have been in the family for hundreds of years. With the crude means of pre-civilized time it took a lifetime to shape and polish a Maori greenstone weapon. War parties journeyed from farthest north and then made long voyages into the South Island merely for the purpose of getting blocks of greenstone—and those parties would have to fight their way down through the many tribes that populated the beaches and the banks of the rivers. So that every *mere* (stabbing-club) now held by a chief has a bloody history—if only it could tell its tale of adventure.

Technically the greenstone is a mineral nephrite. It was known as the *pounamu* of the Maoris. Mineralogically it occurs as rounded segregations in talc or talc-serpentine rocks. These segregations vary up to two feet or even more in lateral dimensions. As a rule, however, they average less than one foot in width.

So far as is known, the mineral has only been found in its original *locus* in the Griffin Range, North Westland, on the west coast of the South Island of New Zealand.

Pounamu is a deep-green semi-transparent mineral with dark opaque patches. From glacier-action it comes down in rounded masses, and is now found as boulders in the glacial débris along the lower streams of the Arahura and Taramakau Valleys. The old-time Maoris knew this locale, hence their expeditions for the *pounamu*.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop. Exception: Our assaying and oil services.

Out of Cattle and into Sheep

HERE'S a comedown! Ask anybody if it isn't—anybody who's a cow puncher, that is:

Question:—"Would you kindly give me any information you may have on outdoor work in States of Wyoming, Montana and Colorado, especially ranching. What are punchers getting for work now, and what would the chance be for a green hand getting work, in that section?

Have been in city for several years, but have the open air in my blood."—S. L. MANLY, Galveston, Tex.

Answer, by Mr. Middleton:—Glad to give you what help I can. First, as to Wyoming. They do not run cattle as they used to in this State. Many of the large cow outfits have gone out of cattle and into sheep, as the open range here seems to be more suitable for sheep than cattle. Then too Wyoming is gradually coming into its own as an agricultural State, and the open range is about a thing of the past. However, there are quite a few large cattle companies left. But the puncher's work these days consists chiefly in riding fence and putting up hay in Summer and feeding in Winter. Still there is quite a bit of riding done in some sections at branding-time, gathering beeves, etc.

Wages in this State have ranged from forty dollars to sixty-five dollars per month for men by the month, and through haying season from three dollars to four and a half dollars per day. Should you decide to try Wyoming, would advise writing to Mr. E. P. Perry, Torrington, Wyoming, or Mr. C. M. Cox, Cody, Wyoming, for further information, as these towns are both in the stock country.

Second. Colorado is even more given to agriculture, than Wyoming, although Moffat County in northwestern Colorado still ships a lot of cattle

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and has a couple of large cow outfits. It has been some three years since I was there. Deer Trail, Hugo and Kit Carson, in eastern Colorado, also ship quite a lot of cattle, and the wages are about the same as in Wyoming.

Third. Montana is not in my territory, but if you will write to Mr. Chester C. Davis, Helena, Mont., who is "A. A." expert for that State, I am sure he will be glad to give you what assistance he can.

If you write him, inquire particularly about the Musselshell country.

Hope this will give you the information you want, and if I can help you further, come again.

The Chibchas

ANOTHER lost confederacy:

Question:—"Was there a lost city of the Chibcha tribe, and where can I find any information about it? I have been to South America three times and spent six years in Colombia prospecting, and found ruins of many buildings in the heart of the Cordilleras in 1915, most of them overgrown with vegetation; but do not know what they are. Expect to go there again in a short time and will clean away the brush and see what they look like. Please omit name and address."

Answer, by Mr. Young:—The Chibchas were a confederacy of nations with the center located in the upper Magdalena Valley near the present location of Bogota, and their language was used throughout the whole mountain region of parts of the present republics of Panama and Ecuador as well as this portion of Colombia. Detached tribes were found as far north as Costa Rica. They ranked close to the Quichuas of Peru in culture, weaving cloth, engaging in agriculture upon irrigated lands, working gold, etc. Some little gold has been taken from the tombs, or *huacas*, that have been unearthed in Costa Rica and Colombia, but nothing to compare with similar finds made in the tombs near Truxillo, Peru, where the Chimu tombs were dug into. Near a million dollars' worth of gold was said to have been taken from one of these *huacas*.

There have been many stories of lost Chibcha cities. There were such rumors of Quichuan cities also, and Hiram Bingham of Yale actually found such a city in the wilds of the mountains of Peru about 1912. There may be a foundation of fact to the rumors of a lost Chibcha city.

The last rumor I have seen to this effect was in a new book printed by Dodd, Mead & Co.—"Panama, Past and Present," by Verrill. He states in this book that an aviator flying north from Colombia to the Zone saw a city perched high in the mountain-tops but was unable to descend low enough to get a good look at it. He might have mistaken rugged mountain-tops for houses and buildings.

One of the best books dealing with the subject is "*Las Chibchas antes de la conquesta española*," by Restrepo, printed in Bogota 1896. Also there is some good data covering the habits of these people in "Mythology of All Races," a set of books published by Marshall Jones & Co., Boston, Mass., and in the volume "Latin America," by Prof. Alexander of Nebraska. I also think the booklet published by the Pan-American Union of Washington, D. C., carries a sketch about this race of people.

An All-Around Knife

ALSO a few words regarding the sheath:

Question:—"If it is within your province, I would like your opinion on the value of applying the Springfield bayonet catch and sheath to a hunting-knife (Western type).

As you probably know, the sheath is made of two pieces of wood—one of very flat "U" section, the other a flat cover. They are accurately joined and sewn into a wet gut or rawhide cover, which shrinks until the joint is invisible. Wouldn't this be much safer than a leather sheath, even with metal edge-protector? I think a heavy fall might cut through even the metal, giving a dangerous wound.

The catch is a small stud on the handle, just above the cross-guard. It actuates a powerful catch, which engages with either of two "ears" on the top of the sheath. (Springfield '17 bayonet—so-called Enfield—does not have this catch.)

I made a knife from such a bayonet, grinding blade thin to remove bleeding grooves, but the mechanic spoiled the blade in tempering, so have no data. The steel will temper (high carbon?). This made a pretty thin blade; I am doubtful if it would be stout enough for general use.

Springfield blade and hilt are one piece. Can you suggest how blade could be cut off and a heavier one substituted?

Your hand-gun dope is priceless. Do you think removing the rod ejector from the Colt's .45 Frontier Model improves the balance? Can not shells be shaken out as quickly as they can be pushed out with the ejector?"—A. W. M., New York.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—The sheath you mention would work all right for a hunting-knife. I would like a metal tip on it. A knife of this kind is not likely to cut through on the edge, half so easily as the point will push through. Practically the entire danger is from the point.

I carry my big bush-knife, 12 inches long, in a sheath with heavy galvanized-iron lining, well soldered. It would never wound me, no matter how hard I fell.

For ordinary hunting, where one does not carry a tool for wood-chopping as well as butchering purposes, a heavy knife is not needed. A strong clasp-knife in which the blade locks when open, is enough.

If a man wants something with which he can split a bone, mine is an excellent type. Get a first-class smith to make one from an old file. Draw the tang out long and put on a strong handle, with the tang extending clear through and riveting down on a washer.

Have him forge the knife to fit that sheath. If he understands oil tempering or cyanid tempering, he can make a knife that will hold an edge and still be tough enough to endure hard usage.

I chop firewood with mine, out of saplings. Have cut down trees five inches thick with it. I know no way to set a heavier blade on yours.

About using a hand gun—read "The Art of Throwing Lead" in the Feb. *Outing*, by Dick Halliday, a cowboy friend of mine. It is good.

I would never remove that ejector. Often a shell will stick, and it just has to be punched out. I never noticed anything wrong with the balance

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of a gun carrying one. I never owned such a gun, but have used them. My guns now are the .32-20 S. & W. and Colt's new service .45, 6 and 8 inch barrels. Formerly I used a pair of .44 S. & W. S. A., with 6-inch barrels. Gave one to my son, sold the other.

Why not take another bayonet and not grind the grooves clear out? Then find a man who can temper steel right. Then have a tip put on the sheath, of good metal.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

Around South America by Canoe

AN INTERESTING itinerary; and sound advice on how to keep well in the tropics:

Question:—"I take the liberty of asking for your criticism and advice on numerous questions arising out of a projected canoe trip around South America.

I realize that your department covers Mexico only, and if you will be so kind as to answer my many queries I will understand that your observations are to be construed as having a bearing only upon the Mexican littoral, except where their character is general.

First let me give you a brief outline of the itinerary. I intend to start from Dubuque, Ia., on October 1, and reach New Orleans about November 1. Proceeding along the coast of Texas and Mexico, I expect to reach: Tampico January 1, 1923; Vera Cruz February 1; Belize March 1; Gracias a Dios April 1; Limon May 1; Colon June 1; Balboa August 1; Medellin September 1; Guayaquil October 1; Callao November 1; Antofagasta December 1; Concepcion January 1, 1924; Punta Arenas February 1; Buenos Aires April 1; Montevideo May 1; Rio June 1; Pernambuco July 1; Para August 1; Cayenne September 1; Ciudad Bolivar October 1; Maracaibo November 1; Barranquilla January 1, 1925; Cristobal February 1; Limon March 1; Gracias a Dios April 1; Belize May 1; Vera Cruz June 1; Tampico July 1; Rio Grande August 1; Corpus Cristi September 1; Galveston October 1; New Orleans November 1; Pensacola December 1; Tampa January 1, 1926; Key West February 1; Palm Beach March 1; Jacksonville, April 1; Charleston May 1; Norfolk June 1; Atlantic City July 1; New York August 1.

My equipment I wish to make as light as possible, and my list now contains the following:

One suit of clothing (in which to strut along the Alameda in Santiago and explore the jungles of Buenos Aires—with such gala occasions excepted I expect to spend the entire four years in a bathing-suit and "salty" trousers); heavy sweater, oilskin and cap, three heavy blankets, two pillows, some rubber sheeting, small tent, tools, rifle, revolver and ammunition, fishing-tackle, field glass, compass, rope, cooking-utensils, storm lantern and kerosene, water tank, maps, shaving-outfit.

Of provisions I intend to take only: Coffee, evaporated milk, salt, oil, flour, and for the rest depend upon my skill in fishing and hunting. Speaking of provisions, brings up point one:

1. What to do for bread? It will probably be simple enough to get enough fish and, farther south, game, but though ordinarily we give bread but little consideration it seems of tremendous importance when I think of eating fish and meat without it, and the only thing I know how to make on a campfire is pan-cakes—tiring in the long run. Is there then a way to bake bread?

2. The thought of eating immediately brings up the thought of drinking—a sufficient supply of sweet water. How large a water tank do you suggest? How is the supply of sweet water? Is it necessary to go far inland?

3. How is fishing in these waters? What tackle do you recommend? Would a drag-net be practical?

4. In the matter of hunting, what game is there? Would game laws interfere, and in what localities? Will it be necessary to go far inland? In this connection, may I also ask you for your recommendation as to a good all-around rifle?

5. Are there any books that you would recommend?

6. What are the best maps to get?

7. What tools do you consider necessary? I want to get away as light as possible and am figuring on ax, hammer and spade. Will that suffice?

Any other suggestions that you may have to offer, you may be sure will be greatly appreciated; and I wish to thank you in advance for your kindness."—EDWARD J. AUDELL, Ph. D., Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—The outline of the itinerary that you have mapped out is very interesting, and I half-way envy you the trip. You did not seem to take in consideration that there are some very severe storms on the gulf and also on the oceans that you are going to travel over. A canoe would not be able to live an hour in a small squall, much less in a stiff breeze that occasionally blows down in the semi-tropical and tropical regions. You had better figure on a larger vessel in which to make your trip. A white man can stand but little of the hot sun in the tropics on the land, while out in the water it is much more severe. A bathing-suit is well enough to wear on the beaches for a few hours at a time up in this part of the temperate zone; but when you arrive in the parts where the sun shines straight down and not a cloud to be seen for days and weeks at a time, it requires a thicker skin than a white man out of the northland possesses. Better figure on more clothing—khaki suits with khaki shirts or light woolen shirts. These shirts will keep the body temperature the same, and you will not be so likely to suffer from overheat or a sunstroke.

Down in that part of the country there are the rainy and the dry seasons. During the rainy season a great deal of water falls every day at about the same time for a period of from five and a half to six months. As the rains come from over the waters you will have to have some protection from it. A poncho is better in some respects than a raincoat, but it would not be amiss to have both.

Along the edges of the waters there is always a large number of mosquitoes, including the malaria, yellow-fever, dengue and other types. Better see about having plenty of mosquito netting, quinin and a few other drugs of like nature.

A metal water tank would not do as it would hold the heat too long, so it would be better to have a wooden keg which could be well soaked with water during the night and refilled at the first opportunity,

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and in this way your water will be cool and drinkable. Also have a water bag which can be dipped into the ocean every few hours to keep it cool.

When you strike the tropics always boil your water before filling your keg, and also eat very sparingly of the fruits. Many suffer untold agonies by neglecting a few simple points on entering the tropicals. After becoming acclimated these precautions can be eliminated. This applies to the first month or so after reaching these regions.

You are going into a coffee country where we get most of ours from, so do not carry more than enough to last a week or so at a time. Coffee loses its strength very rapidly. Some of the best coffee is to be had at New Orleans, so do not lay in too big a supply in Iowa. You can get plenty of supplies at places on the Mississippi where you tie up for the night, so it would hardly pay to lay in all of your supplies when you first start out.

After leaving New Orleans a few days' supplies would not be bad as it would be several days before striking another likely supply point. When you leave the Texas coast and start down the Mexico coast then you can figure on laying in a good supply. In this way your provisions, etc., will stay fresh.

Hard-tack or canned biscuits would be good. They are put up in both the paper cartons and tin boxes. The tins are better as they are moist proof.

You can get bread from stores until you hit Mexico. While you are laid up by rains or accidents you could build a small clay oven and bake up a supply of bread to last for several days.

You will find fresh streams of water, and occasionally springs near the oceans. There is plenty of fish to be found. A hook and line would be ample. A variety of hooks and cord. You would not be long enough in one place to necessitate the taking out of a license even in parts where there is a game law.

Some game ranges far inland among the mountains, so you naturally would have to go inland to hunt such. Most of the big game is found inland away from the coast.

There is plenty of tarpon in the waters around Tampico and somewhat south of there. You may land one of these if you are properly provided. See about that when you get to Tampico.

A .30-30, one of the new model Enfield army rifles, or perhaps a .45 Winchester, would suit you. I've used all of these and one answers the purpose as well as another. Have a water-proof cover for your rifle, for the salty air certainly plays havoc with the riflings and the other parts as well.

The Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., can supply you with maps, books, etc., about Mexico and South America. Rand McNally Co., Chicago, Ill., have good maps of these countries and also of the United States. Go to any of the book stores in your city and look them over. There are several other publishers that put out these maps also—look over their supply and select the one that looks the best.

Have your toilet kit, sewing-kit, spool of good picture or other kind of strong, fine wire, moisture-proof containers for all of your condiments, medicine, matches, an extra strong pocket knife, a file, a screw-driver, a ball of large strong cord, a sleeping-bag—for you are liable to camp some time in a reptile and mosquito infested region and it would be better to be prepared than sorry—a woodman's ax and holder would answer for both an ax and a hammer; a small shovel, for you may ground on a sand-bar; a machete to use in the brush or to cut overhanging limbs out of the way, a whetstone to keep your edged tools in shape, colored glasses to keep the sun from injuring your eyes until you become used to the glare, a flashlight with extras and other small items. By proper packing all of your equipment would take up very little space.

I wish you all kinds of success on your undertaking and would be glad to hear from you off and on. If there is any thing else that you want any suggestions on I'll be glad to do what I can for you.

The same set of questions was sent to Mr. Emerson, who answered it with an eye to possible side trips:

You can get along with a line of clothing, no more than would fill a suitcase; say two suits of khaki, one jumper being of the Norfolk pattern. For a dress "function" you can use white linen, although gray linen will pass you anywhere in any of the cities, even Panama; such clothes you can buy at the place you need them. Light felt hat on the Stetson order, stiff-brimmed, light-weight; same shoes you usually wear—be sure the linings are not worn—pongee shirt, or any light soft shirt—collars wilt—B.V.D. or other light underwear.

Bottle of Eno's Fruit Salts—keep your internal sewer system free of all obstruction—and a copy or two of magazines. You can roll all this in a good strong shawl or light water-proof canvas, and if you can "borrow" an umbrella it will prove handy often in one of those showers when haste is necessary.

You will be surprized at the number of white-skinned men that you will find traveling through all those countries named in your list.

If you are going into the highland you will need Winter clothing in some of the countries, for it gets mighty chilly about 3 A.M. Have you ever used a sleeping-bag? They are warm, but sometimes one has to get out in an emergency, and valuable seconds are thus lost.

I always carry my belt prospecting pole pick, 12 inches longest measurement. It is useful in a thousand ways and makes very little noise in actual use.

A .30-30 rifle, and a .38 Smith & Wesson or Colt's regulation (army) revolver. You can buy larger caliber in the country if you then think you need them, and the price will hardly be any more than if you had bought them in U. S. and paid the various "items" that would be asked along your travels.

Any standard ammunition can be bought in any of the larger towns.

As you designate it in points, let us begin with:

Point 1. *Bread.* There is a "trick" called a fry-pan oven, in which you can bake the following mixture when circumstances will allow, viz:

3 cups of flour (any kind). 1 cup of sugar. 1 pinch of salt. ½ cup of seeded raisins. 2 cups of buttermilk (or sour milk, or goat's milk, sour).

Mix thoroughly, then add 1 teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda dissolved in a tablespoon of warm water; add to batch and stir thoroughly, grease your pan, put in batch and bake slowly for one hour.

Make several loaves whenever you get a chance on the trip; it is the best fodder that a man ever chewed on when on a hike, for you don't need butter

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or anything to go with it but an appetite, and you will always have that; the raisins furnish the iron in the natural way and you will not get tired of this, if baked properly.

Your stove is three rocks, between which you have a bed of coals, and some surrounding dirt so that the heat gets busy with the bottom of your fry-pan oven, which has a top that holds in the heat about 90 per cent. The chances are that any woman's curiosity will be sufficient so that you can persuade her to let you show her how to make the best American style of bread. See the point? Real whole-wheat flour is the best for this.

Water. In the mountains you will find the perfection of water; in the towns also, generally. In other places they sometimes catch the water for drinking in cisterns, but you'd better examine the cistern before you drink it; or you can boil it and thus discourage the microbes.

Enclosed you will find "Life and Trade in Central America," also "A Bird's-Eye View of Central America," also "Prospecting in Latin-America." All three of these are written by Edgar Young of the "Ask Adventure" staff, and they are written from his actual travels and hardships from Argentina all the way up—on foot mostly, on account of scarcity of conveyance—to the northern border of Mexico; and a man can get a very big experience in two solid years of such a hike.

I generally carry a canvas bag—waterproof, outside—for the water question; as you will not use it very much in most parts, and the canvas will fold up, so as not to be bulky, and yet is ready when actually needed. The canteen is not one of the things to take on a hike; it bumps, dents and is in the way.

Different sizes of hooks and lines, depending on where you are fishing. Take six different sizes; you can trade those you haven't use for. You don't need any fancy poles and flies, or you will be loaded to the gunwales, which is out of the question in hiking.

As to the animals you may and probably will, meet. The hottest baby will be the peccary, which is the wild hog of the tropical lands. He weighs about from 45 to 110 pounds and is the devil in a pigskin, as you will observe in your studies of him—while up in the branches of a sturdy tree; I use the term "sturdy" for the reason that if you were up in a slender tree and you were to shoot the leader of a band of peccaries, they would gnaw your tree down very quickly, and with those teeth, as sharp as Gillette blades, they would so separate my Chicago correspondent from life's joys, that he would cease correspondence forever; therefore please take note, let it be a "sturdy" tree, or better plan to shoot the hindermost of the band; then the gang will probably go on and not bother you much.

Through Honduras and Nicaragua you can find plenty to shoot, and there are no game laws to bother you. Your happiest times will be in the mountain region.

As to books. You might profitably consult the Encyclopedia Britannica at your public library on the history and habits of the wild animals as given in "Life and Trade in Central America."

Rand McNally's pocket map of Central America gives you a very good idea as to how the land is arranged.

You should practise with using a machete until you can do so many things with it, that the list you mention would be reduced to a minimum. Send to Collins & Co., 212 Water St., New York, and ask for their catalog on machetes. A good machete, whetstone and sufficient determination will carry you through to your destination if you keep your internal tract free and your conscience clear.

Drop me a line once in five hundred miles. I will enjoy following your line of hike and experiences.

Mysore

MOST healthful and prosperous district in India, declares Capt. Giddings:

Question:—"Can you give me information regarding climate and living conditions in the Mysore district, southern India? I have been offered a responsible position (construction engineer) but must sign term contract (two years) before leaving.

What outfit should be taken for a stay of that time, and what could one do in the hunting and fishing line on the side? What gear of that nature needed, and what special precautions as to photographic films? I'm an ex-service man used to roughing it and want to make my stay worth while if I go.

Any pointers you can give me will be appreciated, or any library references, and I thank you for your trouble."—HARRY W. MITCHELL, Scottsville, Va.

Answer, by Capt. Giddings:—In my opinion the Mysore district is not only the most prosperous but also the healthiest district in the whole of India, and I have no doubt that you can fill a two-year contract most enjoyably. There is no trout or salmon fishing in India, I regret to say; however, the hunting is good.

If you intend going after tiger, I would suggest that you take along a Model '95 Winchester .405. If you purchase a new one, make sure that you specify shotgun butt in place of the rifle butt as ordinarily supplied; also take a good supply of soft-point cartridges. You should have a twelve-gage shotgun as well; but this, along with the rest of your kit, you can pick up in India.

If you were going there primarily to shoot I would send you an outfit list, and advise you to purchase in this country. However, as you are not, take only the Winchester and cartridges. It would be a wise plan to equip the above named rifle with a Lyman No. 38 receiver sight.

I believe Abercrombie & Fitch, sporting-goods dealers, New York, can supply you with films especially packed for tropical use. However, you will have no difficulty in procuring or caring for your films in the district you are contemplating visiting.

Pronged Horns and Webbed Horns

HOW to tell an elk from a moose:

Question:—"After living for eighteen years in the States and Canada I have got into a dispute over the big game of North America.

Kindly inform me:

1. If the elk of the Yellowstone Park and the moose of North Alberta are the same.

2. If different please give the Latin name of the elk. I. R. C. enclosed."—H. B. PAULSON., Kristianstad, Sweden.

Answer, by Captain Hanson:—I have never been

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in North Alberta to know whether the animals you refer to as being there, are moose or elk. However, as to the differences between the two, I would say that to the best of my knowledge they are as follows:

The moose (*cervus canadensis*) is found in the forests of Canada and the eastern United States. It is a larger and longer-legged animal than the elk, with high withers or shoulders like a hump. The antlers are webbed instead of pronged and incline well back so that they do not impede the animal's progress in running through the forest. The moose is a powerful swimmer. His food consists of tree-leaves and the pads of water-lilies found in the shallow waters of lakes. A peculiar feature is the large, protruding upper lip, resembling a Roman nose.

The elk, or wapiti (*alces palmatus*) is a large deer with pronged antlers and long body carried on legs of even length. It is dark brown in color with a disk of light color covering the rumps. The elk has two teeth of ivory in the back of the mouth which are much sought as emblems for the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, of the United States. The elk subsists on grass and herbage. It is found in the Yellowstone Park and the forests of the Northwest.

It is therefore my opinion that the animal you refer to as being found in North Alberta is the elk, or wapiti, such as is found in Yellowstone Park. At the same time it is possible that moose may have found their way into that section across the open-plains country from eastern Canada. If you know whether the animals there have *pronged* horns or *webbed* horns, that would settle the question definitely, for there can be no confusion between those distinguishing characteristics.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Trapping for Profit in Northern Ontario and Quebec

HERE'S a circular that Mr. Sangster had us print off for him:

Despite the fact that my "Ask Adventure" department strictly bars from answering all inquiries on this subject, I regularly receive a flow of such letters.

Some I answer if they bear on other phases of trips, but to put myself fairly before readers seeking such data I desire to state as follows:

Trapping in the North is a hard and thankless game. It is an absolutely different proposition in requirements, in knowledge and in methods from taking fur in such regions as Ohio, New York State, the Southern States or even Michigan.

To attempt it with any hope of breaking anywhere near even with the outlay, one must be experienced in the Northern outdoors. He must be trained in the methods of trapping for these Northern species of fur animals; and such methods here are dictated by climatic conditions, frequent and heavy snows, crusts, thaws, etc.

He must be inured to frequent temperature that at times will quickly freeze the uninitiated and give very serious consequences. He must be an expert in snow-shoeing and in living under very rough and hard conditions.

To those who write asking such information, I would state that without knowing each inquirer and his personal fitness it is a risky proposition to advise. I, for one, won't take that responsibility. I am of the general opinion that the only advice is, "Don't." To spend a month in November or December trapping for pure sport with a hired guide as mentor and in charge is another proposition. The North is a hard mistress to those not "broken" to her ways.

For those of you desiring hunting for moose and bear, or photographing wild life, canoe-cruising or fishing, I can promise you pleasures unequaled on the continent; but for a livelihood trapping is precarious, to put it mildly.—S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck").

The Sphinx

ABOUT this marvel of a world that was ancient even to the ancient Greeks, the mind of man is still active, registering sensations which range from awe to quizzical fancy:

Question:—"Please give me what information you may have as regards the Egyptian Sphinx.

Dimensions?

Whether any excavating has been done at its base, and whether any passages have been discovered?

Its probable age, and whether it is regarded as having been constructed or carved from solid rock?

Whether any new chambers have been discovered in the Pyramids of Cheops?

Is there any belief that records tending to prove the existence of the 'Lost Atlantis' are hidden in the Pyramid of Cheops or the Sphinx? If so, which?"—JOHN R. HOWARD, Port Ludlow, Wash.

Answer, by Mr. Binda:—If I remember correctly the Sphinx is about 172 feet long and 66 feet high from the crown of the head to the pavement on which the forelegs rest. The forelegs are 50 feet long, and the head is about 30 feet long by 14 feet wide.

There is a great deal of doubt as to its age; but Weigall, the Egyptologist with whom I traveled a great deal in Egypt, told me that he estimated it as being about 4,000 years old, and that it was probably built in the time of King Chephren in the Fourth Dynasty.

The main part of this Sphinx is carved out of solid rock, but other masonry has been added around the base and certain parts to complete the form.

When I was there in 1914 there was quite a good deal of excavation being done around its base, and several little temples had been found very close to it. Work was also being done in the face of the Sphinx itself, and a small passage had been found. This work was suspended on account of the war, and I do not know whether it has been taken up again.

About the same time traces of a chamber were discovered in the Pyramid of Ghiza. This work, I understand, has been completed and a great many things of archeological interest found.

I have never heard in my conversations with the different authorities that any records of the "Lost Atlantis" are hidden in the Pyramids of Cheops around the Sphinx, and I doubt if there are any such records in existence.

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Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Hearty thanks are due compadres Charles D. Borror, 902 West Oregon St., Urbana, Ills.; Thomas R. Payne, Jacksonville, Fla.; Charles J. Lane, 241 Eighth St.; and Harry S. Baldwin, Fort McDowell, Calif., for the manuscript of "The Hoboes' Convention" for which I have had a number of requests. Here's the ballad, which friend Borror says he learned from a fellow "gob" in the Naval Hospital at Cape May, N. J., while recuperating from a little adventure "Over There." Truly our Camp-Fire is about the most cosmopolitan spot on the footstool, and we're proud of our bunch.

The Hoboes' Convention

By GEORGE LIEBST

You have heard of big conventions,
And there's some you can't forget—
But get this straight: There's none so great
As when the hoboes met.

At Portland, Oregon, last year
They came from near and far,
On "tops" and "blinds" where cinders whined
And clinging to the draw-bar.

Three hundred came from New York State;
Some came from Eagle Pass.
That afternoon, the third of June,
They gathered there *en masse*.

From the Lone Star State came "Texas Slim"
And "Jack the Katydid;"
With "Lonesome Lou" from Kal'mazoo
Came the "San Diego Kid."

"Denver Dan" and "Boston Red"
Blew in with "Hell's-Fire Jack."
Andy Lang from the Lakeshore gang,
"Big Mac" from Mackinac.

Often heard but seldom seen,
Was the bo called "New York Spike;"
"Con, the Sneak" from Battle Creek
And "Mississippi Ike."

"Chicago Bill," dressed up to kill,
Shook hands with "Frisco Fred,"
While "Half-Breed Joe" from Mexico
Shot craps with "Eastport Ed."

"St. Louis Jim" and "Pittsburgh Paul"
Fixed up a jungle stew,
While "Slippery Slim" and "Bashful Tim"
Croaked gumps for our menu.

The "Jockey Kid" spieled out a song,
Along with "Desp'rate Sam;"
And "Paul the Shark" from Terror Park
Clog-danced with "Alabam'."

We gathered round the jungle fire;
The night was passing fast;
We'd all done time for every crime
And talk was of the Past.

All night we sat around the fire,
Until the morning sun—
Then from the town the bulls came down;
We beat it on the run.

We beat it over the boundary lines
And into other States.
Some rode the rods on passenger trains,
While some blew out on freights.

So here I am in Denver,
A tired-out hungry bo,
And when the next fast train pulls out
"Yours truly's" going to blow.

That's her; she's whistling for the block.
I'll make her on the fly:
Number Nine, fast mail to Omaha,
I'm off again—good-by.

I am greatly indebted to compadre William Weber of Austin, Texas, for the words of "Clancy's Wooden Wedding," also to compadre Hiram Gallagher, of Queenston, Ontario, for the words of the old song, "The Cove of Cork," which follows. "Clancy's Wooden Wedding" is a bit long for the limited amount of room we have. I will send the song to the comrade that asked for it if he will speak up once more.

The Cove of Cork

Three years ago this very day I left the Cove of Cork.
An emigrant from old Erin's Isle, I landed in New York
Without a friend to greet me there, a stranger on the shore.
I held an honest upright hand and fortune came galore.
So here I am now back again in dear old Erin's Isle.
My friends they met me on the quay and greeted me with a smile.
Their faces sure I'd 'most forgot, I was so long away;
And my mother introduced them all and this to me did say:

Chorus: "Shake hands with your Uncle Mike, me boy; shake hands with your sister Kate.
And this is the girl you used to swing down on the garden gate.
Shake hands with all the neighbors and kiss the colleens all.
You're as welcome as the flowers in May in your old home Donegal.

They had a party when I got back; they came from near and far.
The streets were lined for near a mile with Irish jaunting-cars.
The whisky flowed like buttermilk to greet our hearts with joy,
And the piper played an Irish reel to greet our Yankee boy.
They sang and danced the whole night long; such fun was never seen—
The boys all dressed in corduroys and the girls in ribbons green.
Their faces sure I'd 'most forgot, I was so long away;
And my mother introduced them all and this to me did say: *Chor.*

Compadre B. Labeeme, P. O. Box 608, Proctor, Minn., would like to get the words of the song "Down by the Old Cherry Orchard." Chip, comrades.

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Compadre J. B. Le Compte, 3486 Brush St., Detroit, Mich., would like to get his mitt on the words and music of "The Hoboes' Marching Song:"

I got on the bumpers;
Didn't have no fare;
And along comes a brakie
And says, "What do ye there?"
Oh, it's hop off, hop off, etc.

Also the following: Marching song of the Confederate guerillas—Bedford Forrest's and Moseby's men, said to be a companion piece to "Captain Jinks;" also the music to an old-time waltz known as "Little Slippers."

Compadre George H. Burns, of Lake George, York County, N. B., Canada, would be glad to get the words of the old song "Howard Carey."

Compadre William Weber, St. Edward's College, Austin, Texas, would like to get the words of "Toledo Slim," a hobo song.

Compadre Owen Harris, 25 South Street, New York, would appreciate being put wise to the song "The Whitest Man I Know."

Hearty thanks to Compadre M. M. Kennedy, Assistant Secretary of the Neptune Association of New York, for several most interesting salt-water ditties which have recently appeared in *The Neptune Log*, a monthly publication devoted to the interests of those "who go down to the sea in ships." Helpful stuff, this, and much appreciated.

Comrade Clarence Martin, 1540 North Saginaw St., Flint, Mich., would like to get the words of the following old-timers which some of you old-timers may know: "The Wexford Girl," "The Jam on Garry's Rock," "Three Leaves of Irish Shamrock," and another with the chorus line of: "Auctioneer, auctioneer, wont you please stop the sale?" Any one oblige Mr. Martin?

Our keen appreciation of "Naval Songs" to William A. Pond & Co., of this city. This is a most interesting compilation of words and music of patriotic and tuneful songs of the deep sea, as arranged by Rear-Admiral Luce. A very worthwhile bunch of stuff.

Compadre John H. Heltzen, Sr., of Winter Park, Fla., sends us in a couple of good briny deep-sea ditties for our collection against the day that they may be asked for by some sitter-in at the Camp-Fire. Our best to Bro. Heltzen.

In reply to a query from comrade Ralph Bertucelli of Chicago, I reprinted a poem of Robert W. Service's entitled "Beyond." It was not what comrade Bertucelli asked for; but the bit of verse entitled "A Little Further," by Berton Braley is the poem he asked for. I discovered it in *Adventure*, of Aug. 3, 1921. These correspondents, among others, were helpful in putting me on the right track: V. E. Harper, Long Beach, Calif.; W. T. Hart, Vallejo, Calif.; Ben W. Hart, Austin, Minn.; Stuart H. Kelley, Omaha, Neb.; D. Schoeman, Bronx, N. Y.; Robert L. Williams, Amsterdam, N. Y.; Parker Stone, Auburn, Me.; Basil Raftery, San Francisco; Maver Bradley, Jersey City; Harry Daneker, Edgewood, R. I.; P. R. Gunn, Los Angeles; C. J. Mendenhall, Warren, Ohio; Roscoe R. Barnes, Lawton, Okla.; Prince Pearce, Hugo, Okla.; Don Thompson, Odell, Ore.—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

NOVEMBER 20TH ISSUE

Beside the complete novel mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE SEA-HAWK A Five-Part Story Part IV — *Rafael Sabatini*
An expedition against the galleys of Spain.

PIRATE TALES FROM THE LAW—KIDD Salt-Water Money — *Arthur M. Harris*
A buccaneer whose crimes were unprofitable.

SHANGHAI FRIED CHICKEN — *William H. Wells*
Hungry sailors plan a come-back.

IT'S ONLY A QUESTION OF TIME — *Negley Farson*
Officer and non-com. wage a private feud in the air.

FOR WOUNDING—RETALIATION — *Nictzin Dyalhis*
Inez, the Pima squaw, takes the warpath.

THE BATTLE OF THE IMPIS — *Santie Sabalala*
Native campaigning in Africa where victory does not halt the killing.

THE FIRST BORN — *Lewis H. Kilpatrick*
A little stranger in the home—and the mountaineer breaks jail.

THE SPIRIT OF THE C. Z. — *Edgar Young*
A glimpse of the man who put through the "big ditch."

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Of course they're smart! They're Kum-a-part!

Impress this name on your memory—"Kum-a-part"—the "buy" word for buttons of supreme convenience for soft cuffs, and for the belt buckle that snaps and can't slip. We've die-stamped this name on the back of every button and buckle. Look for it there if you don't look but it's wise to make sure - - -

WRITE FOR STYLE BOOK 30 WITH CORRECT DRESS CHART

IN GOLD, SILVER & PLATINUM AT JEWELERS. IN POPULAR QUALITIES AT MENS SHOPS

The [illegible] & Wilde Co.
in the Attleboros, state of Massachusetts

KUM-A-PART
PRODUCTS
TRADE MARK REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.
The Kuff Button — The Belt Buckle

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COLGATE'S

"HANDY GRIP"
REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

The Refill Shaving Stick

The metal "Handy Grip," containing a trial size stick of Colgate's Shaving Soap sent for 10c. When the trial stick is used up you can buy the Colgate "Refills," for the price of the soap alone. There are 350 shaves in a Colgate Shaving Stick—double the number you can get from a tube of cream at the same price.

Like Putting a New Bit in an Au

THE brace is not thrown away when a new is needed for the auger. Neither is it necess to buy a new "Handy Grip" when your Shav Stick is used up. The "Handy Grip" and Contai last for years. Colgate "Refill" Shaving Sticks you the price of the soap alone.

Lathering with Colgate's means shaving eas whether you use hot water or cold, wa er or hard. There is no need of mussy rubl in with the fingers. The fragrant lather leaves face cool and refreshed.

The stick is the most economical form of shaving soap. We can give you this assurance impartially, since we make shaving powder and cream, as well as shaving sticks. But if you *prefer* cream, you will acknowledge when you have shaved with Colgate's Rapid-Shave Cream that you never knew before how good a shaving cream could be. It is one of our latest products, made on a new principle, and brought to perfection after years of scientific effort

COLGATE & CO., *Dept. C*, 199 Fulton St., NEW Y

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